Experiences of Aging and Older Adult's Identity Tensions Across Socio-Economic Lines

by

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Abstract

The present sociological research set out to explore the effects of aging on the identities of people aged 65 years and older, and how these experiences vary across socioeconomic lines within the context of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Drawing on activity theory, continuity theory, and the social constructionist view of aging, this qualitative research employs semi-structured interviews and a demographic questionnaire to better understand participants' experiences of aging and the nature of their identities in later life. The findings reveal that age is not as relevant to participants in terms of how they define themselves right now. However, there appears to be an enduring relationship between participants' identities and the work they have engaged in throughout their lives. Therefore, as these people approach or enter retirement, many are met with tension around the loss of their professional roles and environments. For some, the lack of these longstanding roles and loss of social networks results in identity-related tensions and feelings of diminished self-worth which Canadian society's emphasis on productivity exasperates. From the findings of this study, in conjunction with the existing theories and empirical evidence, there is a legitimate basis for further research regarding older adults' identities and the potential benefits that some form of post-capitalist society may have in the lives of older adults.

Keywords: aging, ageism, older age, identity, socioeconomic status, retirement, social networks, capitalism, activity theory, continuity theory, social construction of age

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In contemporary Canadian society, there is a culturally informed sense of what the "normal" aging process should look like (Chonody & Teater, 2018, p.24). As a result, Chonody and Teater contend that society presumes a linear and predetermined set of cultural ideals regarding the activities, social roles, and bodily capacities that "should" characterize people at various stages of their life course (p.24). Across industrial capitalist nations, due to their political, economic, and social landscape, these narratives are typically defined through an ageist framing, wherein there is an idealization of youth and a devaluation of status associated with older ages (Berger, 2017, p.184). From this perspective, the normalization of negative stereotypes arises wherein all older adults are presumed to be experiencing a period of increasing dependence, a decline in physical, cognitive, and social capabilities, a shift to the sidelines of society, and displeased attitudes about life (Chonody & Teater, 2018, p.34). However, as MacKean and Abbot-Chapman (2012) argue, these generalizations homogenize the older population, effectively silencing the diverse range of lived experiences older adults go through as they negotiate the sociocultural lines of what it means to age and the pressures to comply with conventional age-based expectations (p.47). Therefore, it is crucial that the heterogeneity of these people's experiences is heard and understood to equitably address their diverse needs in later life.

Across the field of sociology, a large volume of literature demonstrates the profound effects of socioeconomic status on more quantifiable measures of older adults' aging experiences, such as physical health outcomes (Pampel et al., 2010; Wang & Geng, 2019), health care disparities (Kennedy & Morgan, 2006; Shi & Stevens, 2005), and economic security (Crystal & Shea, 1990; Gustman & Steinmeier, 2000). However, significantly less literature

explores whether socioeconomic position translates into the older population's subjective thoughts about the aging process and how they view themselves in society. Therefore, using qualitative research methods (primarily semi-structured interviews), the present study set out to address this gap by allowing older Canadian adults to discuss their subjective experiences of later life in relation to society's values and age-based expectations. From these conversations, the initial goal of this research was to identify themes regarding how older adults' socioeconomic background might affect their experiences and identities.

To address this relative gap in the sociological literature on aging, this research and its associated methods were guided by the question: How do older adults from various socioeconomic backgrounds think of and experience the aging process? Through this question, the present research also explored older adults' subjective views of aging and the norms associated with particular domains such as the body, cognition, activities, kinship, and relationships. Additionally, through the design of the interview guide, this research sought to offer insight into how older adults perceive themselves relative to their chronological age, what effects the aging norms associated with industrial capitalist narratives of older age have on the way participants perceive themselves; and in what ways they negotiate their identities in relation to the aging norms associated with these narratives of older age.

However, as the current study progressed, it became apparent that was not as relevant to the research participants in terms of their identity or how they see themselves at this point in their lives. During the data collection process, the realization set in that the experiences and identities of the older adults in this research appeared to be more significantly shaped by the work they were engaged in throughout their lives. Therefore, while this research was not designed to explore older adults' work experiences directly, the fieldwork involved in this study

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has resulted in a reorientation of the study, placing notions of work at the heart of this text's outcomes.

With the average age of many North American and European nations increasing rapidly over the next several decades, it is crucial that we understand the heterogeneity of older adults because most analyses and public policies treat older populations and their experiences as homogenous. For instance, Statistics Canada's (2022) moderate growth projections indicate that the proportion of Canadians aged 65 and over will grow from 18.5% in 2021 to 23.1% in 2043, continuing to 25.9% by 2068. Further, as the baby boomer cohort continues to enter later life, the proportion of Canadians aged 75 and older may triple in the same time frame, from 871,000 in 2021 to 3.2 million in 2068 (Statistics Canada, 2022). With these projections, Canada's highest proportion of people aged 85 and over will reside in the Atlantic provinces (Statistics Canada, 2022). By highlighting the heterogeneity of the aging experience among this fast-growing population, our knowledge can expand and advance, which may encourage changes in social policy and structure, helping ensure older adults have equal opportunity to feel valued in their bodies and society. Before reviewing the literature that will frame the present study, it is relevant to briefly discuss this research's personal significance.

In my honours research (Pike, 2022), I explored the social lives of older adults who self-describe as "young at heart" - that is, people 65 years or older who feel that their chronological age exceeds their biological, psychological, and social ages. More specifically, my research investigated whether these older adults who identify as young-at-heart experience social isolation as they deviate from the traditional aging norms of society, which emphasize a natural and inevitable slowing down, increase in dependence, and relegation to the periphery of society.

However, through the findings and limitations of this research, I was left with a further curiosity regarding the relationship between older adults, the aging process, and their identities.

For example, all the older adults in my study either implicitly or explicitly said that their chronological age was a relatively meaningless marker that did not define who they were as a person (Pike, 2022, p.20). However, they did acknowledge that society's chronological aging norms present an obstacle in their lives (Pike, p.25). Often, many of the ways these people spoke of navigating this obstacle involved having the privilege of a certain degree of free time or material resources. Finally, most of the seniors in my study characterized themselves through these active, independent, symbolically youthful identities in ways that reflect neoliberal notions of choice and responsibility and reflect an idealization of youth that exists across industrial capitalist nations, such as their continued engagement in certain physical activities, their continued pursuit of knowledge, and their positive attitudes about life. Reflecting on these findings, a glaring limitation of my honours research was likely at the root of many of these relatively homogenous responses. The research sample was almost entirely white males who are beneficiaries of middle-to-upper socioeconomic status. From this realization, I became inquisitive about how socioeconomic status affects the relationship between older adults' experiences of the aging process and how they negotiate their identities in later life. Therefore, I thought I could learn more about this if I worked with a more diverse group of older Canadians for my MA research.

As this text proceeds to frame the present research within relevant sociological literature on aging and identity, the aim is to highlight relevant theories and concepts, their significance in this research, and the value that this research can bring to what is a relative gap in the sociological literature on aging. The three primary theoretical lenses that frame the following

research findings are activity theory, continuity theory, and the social construction of age. Additionally, the following section provides a review of concepts and empirical evidence that are relevant to the study of aging, identity, and work in relation to socioeconomic status. After this review, there will be an explanation of the methodological design of this research, which includes details about the research sample of seventeen participants aged 65 and over who reside in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), the non-random recruitment methods used to obtain this sample, the semi-structured interviews responsible for these research findings, and the inductive approach to data analysis. Then, there is a description of the research findings, including the three main themes that arose from this research, which are the enduring connection between work and older adults' identity, the impacts of retirement on older adults' sense of self, and the broader social and cultural contexts that influence these experiences. Finally, a critical discussion of the research findings indicates that a shift toward a post-capitalist society could positively affect the identity and well-being of older adults in Canadian society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As outlined in the previous chapter, although the initial intent of this study was to explore the effects of aging on older adults' identities and how these experiences vary across socioeconomic lines, throughout the data collection process, it appeared that age wasn't as relevant to my research participants in terms of their how they define themselves right now. However, along with this realization, I discovered an enduring relationship between participants' identities and the work they have engaged in throughout their lives. With this, there appears to be relative scarcity in the sociological literature directly addressing older adults' perceptions of the aging process at the intersection of work and identity while considering how socioeconomic status factors into this relationship. Therefore, this literature review aims to situate the following research by exploring existing sociological theories related to aging, identity, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, this chapter highlights several important concepts to the study, such as ageism, socioeconomic status, and capitalism, while exploring empirical evidence related to aging, identity, work, and socioeconomic status. Through this framing, Chapter Five will provide a critical discussion of the research findings and explore how a post-capitalist shift in society could offer potential benefits for the identity and well-being of older adults in Canadian society.

2.1. Activity Theory

Originating from the symbolic interactionist sociological perspective, the activity theory of aging asserts that a positive correlation exists between the level of activity that older adults engage in and their well-being in later life (Dorfman et al., 1988, p.26). The reason for this, Winstead et al. (2017) explain, is based on the presumption that as people age, social structures inevitably displace them from certain activities and roles, which can lead to older adults experiencing decreases in life satisfaction, negatively affecting their sense of self (p.3).

Therefore, Winstead et al. contend that activity theory suggests that people develop and maintain a sense of self through engagement in social roles and activities (p.3). With this, intentional engagement in various forms of activities serves as a restorative mechanism wherein older adults can replace previously held social roles and conducts, resulting in a better quality of life and maintain self-contentment (Winstead et al., p.3). Particularly, Dorfman et al. (1988) explain that activity theory emphasizes that informal social interaction shared between friends, relatives, coworkers, and neighbors has the most positive impact in this sense (p.26). By being socially active within these social networks, Dorfman et al. suggest older adults maintain an essential support system that reaffirms self-concept and subsequently promotes late-life satisfaction (p.26). Therefore, activity theorists argue that although social structures inherently displace older adults from specific social roles in later life, the adverse effects of this role loss can be mitigated by taking on new roles through continued activity, subsequently maintaining or increasing older adults' identities and quality of life (Lobo et al., 2017, p.16; Lemon et al., 1972, p.512).

To test this theory, Winstead et al. (2017) assessed the impact of participation in voluntary, informal activities on life satisfaction, social isolation, and loneliness using data from a longitudinal study of older adults in assisted and independent living communities (AICs) (p. 2). The researchers conducted weekly interviews with a sample of 141 older adults living in 15 different AICs across a medium-sized metropolitan city in the Southern United States over eight weeks (Winstead, p.5). Aligning with previous studies that frame their research, their results support activity theory in that they found that older adults exhibiting increased interaction with others in ongoing meaningful activities over the eight weeks showed improved quality of life, specifically in the categories of life satisfaction and feelings of social isolation (Winstead et al., p.14). Similarly, Menec (2003) investigated the relationship between activity and several

indicators of "successful" aging, such as well-being, function, and mortality, in a Canadian

setting using data from the Aging in Manitoba (AIM) Study (p. 75). According to their results,

happiness, improved cognitive function, and a lower death rate six years later positively

correlated with overall activity level, supporting the activity theory (Menec, p.79).

However, Loue et al. (2008) recognize that critics have been vocal about activity theory's

inability to take account of other circumstances that affect older adults' capacity to be highly

active in later life (p.80). Some of these factors include personality traits, socioeconomic status,

and cultural norms, to name a few (Loue et al., p.80). For instance, someone with limited

material resources may become overburdened financially by engaging in various activities,

subsequently limiting the satisfaction they gain, resulting in a potential detriment to their self-

concept (Loue et al., p.80). Nonetheless, in conjunction with other theoretical frameworks of

aging and identity, this lens is useful in my research.

2.2. Continuity Theory

Advancing a similar idea to that of activity theory (Moody & Sasser, 2012, p.11),

continuity theory is a framework that posits that as people develop through adulthood, they form

a sense of internal and external structures in which they desire to maintain continuity as a

mechanism of adapting to the aging process (Atchley, 1972, p.36). Internal continuity manifests

through beliefs, preferences, thought patterns, and personality traits, while external continuity

pertains to activities, relationships, lifestyles, and social roles (Atchley, p.36). With these

predispositions deeply engrained in a person's self-conception and worldview, continuity theory

highlights the significance of individuals maintaining connections with past personal and social

experiences to counteract any adverse psychosocial effects that may result from the aging

process (Atchley, 1989, p.183). Therefore, Atchley (1972) argues that a person's response to

aging must be understood by analyzing the complex relationship between biological and psychological changes, the person's inward and outward perceptions, situational opportunities for continuity, and their actual experiences (p.36). As a result, the influence of personal preference and societal approval makes continuity a significant adaptive approach to aging (Atchley, 1989, p.183).

Despite its strengths, continuity theory has also been the subject of criticism. For instance, the most controversial criticism of continuity theory is that Atchley bases this theory on the notion of "normal" aging (Quadagno, 2014, p.53). Critics are quick to push back against Atchley's distinction of normal aging from pathological aging, which neglects older adults with chronic illness, arguing that there is no "normal" aging, and in fact, chronic illness and disease are a common and natural aspect of older age that "does not preclude the ability to participate in society in personally and socially meaningful experiences" (Quadagno, p.53). However, it's important to note that robust empirical evidence supports its applicability in research on aging and identity, providing a solid foundation for its validity.

For instance, König et al. (2018) conducted research in Sweden to explore the socioeconomic differences in cognition and well-being, comparing workers to retirees (p.63). Using a representative sample of 5,913 individuals between the ages of 60 and 66 years who were recruited through Sweden's equivalent to the Canada census, their sample consisted of working and retired people, allowing for group comparisons (König et al., p.69). The findings of this study, in support of continuity theory, suggest that the impact of meaningful work is similar for both workers and retirees. Retirement-related job loss did not have an effect on participants' work identity, and individuals were observed to still find satisfaction in identifying with their previous work roles even after retirement (König et al., p.77). König et al. recognize that due to

Sweden's progressive social policies, which safeguard retirees and people of lower socioeconomic status, the applicability of these results from their 2015 study may differ across countries (p.77). However, these findings are congruent with the findings of Damman and Henkens's (2016) research on older adults in the Netherlands (p.18) and with Reitzes and Mutran's (2006) findings based out of North Carolina, USA (p.356), demonstrating a broader applicability of continuity theory.

2.3. The Social Construction of Age and Life Stages

Across many North American and European nations, including Canada, when people speak of age, they refer to chronological age, the numerical value that signifies the number of years that have elapsed since birth (Vincent et al., 2006, p.2). Customarily, people think of aging as a natural and linear process that happens within our bodies slowly but inevitably (Cruikshank, 2013, p.1); they know the duration from birth until death as a 'lifetime,' which serves as a cultural narrative and key structural feature framing one's life trajectory in chronological age stages, including young, middle, and old age (Pickard, 2016, p.172). These chronological age stages are understood as fixed and "real" because of their association with bodily transitions and markers, such as the greying of hair or the use of a cane, which presumes an indication of a person's membership to the category of old age (Vincent at el., 2006, p.2). These age stages are then associated with norms, roles, activities, and events deemed a "normal" part of a person's passage through these stages (Chonody & Teater, 2018, p.24).

However, as Overall (2006) notes, social constructionist scholars view chronological age as an arbitrary, relative, and reductionist means of characterizing people since years lived do not of themselves constitute the state of one's age (p.129). For instance, people do not acquire the symbolic physical and psychological markers of aging at the same rates (p.130). Some people

may be viewed as "old" at 50 rather than 70 because of a genetic predisposition to the early wrinkling of their skin or require using a cane for mobility due to an injury earlier in life (Overall, p.130).

Therefore, Cruikshank (2013) contests the centrality of chronological age by offering a social constructionist perspective of aging, arguing that age is a social construct whose meaning derives from culturally constructed age stages across the life course (p.2). Cruikshank and many other social scientists support the notion that aging is not a wholly natural process but one of relativity and conditioning as it does not exist outside of culture or human intervention – it is created, reinforced, and sustained, through human relations and practices (Degnen, 2007; Overall, 2006). From a social constructionist perspective, we as humans are largely responsible for the origins of what it means to reach a specific age or life stage. The media and the nation state disseminate these understandings among the population, subsequently reinforcing and sustaining these ideas as immutable facts of human existence. That is not to deny that humans experience physiological and psychological changes as they age. However, as Cruikshank (2013) attests, it recognizes that those changes occur in a particular social setting, influenced by our social characteristics and society's political and economic climate, and are made meaningful at a social level (p.1). Therefore, from a sociological perspective, aging and the life stage of older age are much more complex than a fixed biological reality; these are social constructs heavily dependent on cultural context, and we should see the norms, roles, and events associated with aging as such.

For these reasons, this research approaches the notion of aging through a social constructionist framing. Finally, while acknowledging that there is no definitive physiological basis for a definitive definition of "old age", "older adult", or "senior," in this research, these

terms refer to, as it has been for much of the twentieth century across much of North America and Europe, those aged 65 years and older (Pickard, 2016. p.200). With this conception of aging established, the following section utilizes a sociological perspective to demonstrate how the interplay between the normative paradigm of chronological age and society's political and economic climate functions as a macro force shaping the foundation of older adults' experiences throughout industrial capitalist nations.

2.4. Ageism and Narratives of Older Age

Ageism, a form of discrimination based on age, is a pervasive force that can significantly impact the lives of older adults. It is a consequence of the chronological age system, the capitalist economic system, and the neoliberal ideology of many industrial capital. Scholars such as Cruikshank (2013), Katz & Laliberte-Rudman (2019), and Overall (2006) have studied this issue extensively and suggest its effects manifest in societies all over the globe.

For instance, the social practices and institutions of industrial capitalist societies, such as Canada, typically establish and reinforce negative perceptions of old age, equating a specific number of years lived into social liabilities, justifications for subordination, and sources of shame, which can manifest in many areas of older adult's lives and negatively affect their experiences in society (Overall, 2006, p.131). Vauclair et al. (2014) attest that as targets of ageist attitudes, aged people are frequently viewed as inferior to younger adults in terms of power, wealth, respect, influence, and social status (p.650). Additionally, these perceptions can have far-reaching consequences in the lives of aged people, including how they are judged and treated in social interaction, and potentially lead to adverse effects on their health and well-being (Vauclair et al., p.650). There is a robust volume of literature exploring this phenomenon, and social scientists call these widely held beliefs the decline narrative of aging (Foster & Walker, 2014;

Holstein & Minkler, 2003; Katz & Laliberte-Rudman, 2019; Overall, 2006; Vauclair et al., 2014). However, the prominence of such decline narratives of aging is culturally relative.

In contrast, Lamb et al. (2017) provide a cross-cultural perspective, attesting that age-based dependence and frailty are increasingly accepted and even valued parts of personhood and critical aspects of the human condition in many nations outside Europe and North America (p.5). Further, in Lamb's (2000) study of the women and men of Mangaldihi Village in West Bengal, India, a place where the longer one lives, the more powerful their identity and status within the community grows (p. xii). In the context of industrial capitalist nations, there are some cases where people might view aging as a sign of increased social status, such as aged people receiving discounts at businesses and priority access to certain services. However, it is more convincingly the case that these accommodations reflect ageist ideas and the presumption that these people have limited means of economic and social well-being due to inherent age-related deficiencies.

Countering the decline narrative of senior citizenship are age-defying narratives of aging, such as successful aging, active aging, healthy aging, and third age (Foster & Walker, 2014; Laslett, 1989; Martin et al., 2014; Vauclair et al., 2014). These narratives are supposed to represent a paradigm shift from the discriminatory and oppressive narrative of aging as an inevitable decline in physical and cognitive capacity and disengagement from society (Conkova & Lindenberg, 2020, p.270). However, there are a plethora of social scientists who argue that these age-defying narratives are hardly liberating for older adults as they are rooted in ageism, promote neoliberal ideas such as responsibility and choice, and are typically actualized through the possession of financial resources, effectively ignoring social, environmental, cultural, and structural contexts of aging (Berridge & Martinson, 2018; Katz & Calasanti, 2014; Laceulle, 2018; Trentham & Neysmith, 2017). With these mainstream narratives of aging in mind, this

research considers how these narratives play into older adults' identities and their perceptions of the aging process.

2.5. Socioeconomic Status and Later Life

Cruikshank (2013) defines socioeconomic status as a hierarchical measure of an individual or group's social and economic position in society and a reflection of their access to resources and opportunities as a product of their education, income, and occupation (p.21). As such, this concept is critical to the sociological understanding of human societies as structured systems of inequalities, wherein individuals and social groups possess different degrees of power and control in how their life experiences take shape (Lopes, 2011, p.91).

One of the most significant ways that socioeconomic status shapes people's experiences of older adulthood is through its impact on a person's health and well-being. Research consistently shows that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience health disparities throughout their life course, the accumulation of which has direct adverse outcomes in older age, such as higher rates of restricted physical functioning, disability, and mortality (Pickard, 2016, p.102). There are many reasons for these disparities, including lifestyle factors, unequal access to healthcare, and precarious working conditions.

For instance, Lopes (2011) indicates that older adults of lower socioeconomic status experience higher morbidity and mortality rates, partly because they may have less financial capacity to lead a healthy lifestyle (p.106). Further, studies suggest that this demographic may be more likely to engage in behaviors detrimental to their health, such as smoking or excessive alcohol consumption (Lopes, p.106). Cruikshank (2013) supports this notion but emphasizes the recognition that low socioeconomic status is the fundamental cause of these unhealthy lifestyles and the subsequent adverse health outcomes, not the individual behaviours themselves (p.94).

However, these socioeconomic status-related health disparities do not present themselves exclusively in the form of physical health outcomes. Essential to this research, Lopes (2011) indicates that older adults of lower socioeconomic status display disadvantaged positions in a series of dimensions of well-being, including self-perception of health, satisfaction with life, perceived happiness, and loneliness (p.90). Findings from Steverink et al's (2001) research on Germans aged 40 to 85 support this notion, reporting that, on a subjective level, adults with a lower income and a lower educational level typically experience aging in terms of physical decline and social losses, while those with higher income and education perceive this process in terms of continuous growth (p.371).

Another factor influencing the health disparities experienced by older adults of low socioeconomic status is their employment conditions. Walker and Foster (2006) contend that older people previously employed in unskilled occupations such as rigorous manual labour are twice as likely to experience physical impairments or disability as those who find employment in higher middle-class occupations, highlighting the strong relationship between health status and occupational class (p.50). Therefore, people in lower socioeconomic demographics may experience physical conditions people consider as representative of old age at 40 because of the precarious conditions in which they worked, whereas those of higher socioeconomic status may reach 70 before physically experiencing disabling conditions (Overall, 2006, p.130).

Moreover, access to health care is a significant factor influencing the health status of older adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Research shows that across middle and high income nations, there tends to be a socioeconomic status gradient in the use of healthcare services, wherein people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less access to healthcare, let alone good quality healthcare, and may have a more difficult time navigating the healthcare

system (Lopes, 2011, p.104). A study by Hajizadeh et al. (2016) reveals this phenomenon exists in the Canadian context, with socioeconomic status inequalities in health widening in Canada, especially among women, over the past four decades (p.1048). As a result, people of lower socioeconomic status are less able to appropriately manage ailments that might arise as they age through the course of life, and are less likely to receive the care they need to manage chronic conditions that may occur due to their lifestyles and the working conditions they endure.

Additionally, socioeconomic status is directly associated with people's ability to afford and plan for retirement – a significant life event often considered an integral part of older adults' identities. However, as Lopes (2011) contends, in the societal context of the UK, not only is poverty a persistent feature of life amongst older adults, but the wealth inequality between older adults and the rest of society continues to grow (p.97). Due to the social and political structural similarities between UK and Canadian society, one might presume older Canadians also experience this phenomenon. Moreover, in line with life course theory, Walker and Foster (2006) insist that the economic and material resources a person may have accumulated over their lifetime, such as savings, pensions, and property, are a significant factor in determining their ability to retire and the quality-of-life they will experience if they do so (p.41). Therefore, those whose occupational trajectories are mainly characterized by low income and low occupational status are much more susceptible to poverty in old age than their higher-status counterparts (Lopes, 2011, p.98).

As noted earlier, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds typically find employment in domains that offer little room for the accrual of material resources and assets after acquiring survival necessities. If these people are fortunate, they have earned some form of pension through employment. However, research by Walker and Foster (2006) indicates that, in

the UK context, occupational pension coverage is skewed dramatically in favour of higher socioeconomic groups, wherein the highest earners receive the highest pensions due to hierarchical occupational structures (p.46). It becomes clear here that inequality is created and reinforced through the structure of employment and pension systems - the people with the greater need for pension funds receive the most modest remittances (Price & Dinn, 2006, p.78). As these people struggle with their access to resources and navigate the reality of living in poverty, a common obstacle they confront is their lack of control over their living conditions.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize that socioeconomic status relates directly to the material resources that assist people in remaining autonomous within their homes during late life (Walker & Foster, 2006, p.52). Consequently, those lacking resources may have to relocate to an assisted living facility – a move generally associated with reduced agency and independence (Walker & Foster, 2006, p.52). However, the influence that socioeconomic status has in determining older adults' living conditions does not stop here, as financial resources help sustain a greater degree of agency in terms of when such a move occurs and the quality of the care facility in which they relocate (Ball et al., 2009, p.15). In their research, Ball et al. found that the more control older adults had over moving to an assisted living facility, the happier they were with the move's outcomes (p.2). These findings receive support from numerous studies of nursing home relocation wherein there is a positive relationship between control of decision-making and resident well-being (Ball et al., p.2).

By exploring this literature, it becomes apparent that socioeconomic status profoundly influences older adults' retirement experiences, access to material resources and social networks, and health and well-being. Consequently, this raises the question of whether socioeconomic status similarly influences older adults' identities as they age. Therefore, the present research will

consider socioeconomic status and its impact on older adults' experiences of aging and their

identities. Although some people may question the use of socioeconomic status rather than class

when examining issues of identity, the rationale behind this decision is that socioeconomic status

appears to be used more prevalently across sociological literature.

2.6. Work, Identity, and Retirement

In Canada, like many industrial capitalist nations, paid work and the economy are at the

center of society and culture (Moen & Fields, 2002, p.21; Manor, 2017, p.987). Through people's

participation in the workforce, they gain not only a source of income and a framework for

structuring their time but also a source of social status and identity, an environment for social

interaction, and meaningful experiences that can provide a sense of purpose and self-fulfillment

(Moen & Fields, p.21; Manor, p.987; Fryers, 2006, p.2). Because such a significant amount of

people's time in adulthood is typically spent working, people's jobs and careers typically

represent a primary source of people's identity and broader social relations (Moen & Fields,

p.21; Manor, p.987; Fryers, p.2). As a result of work's cultural centrality in industrial capitalist

societies, shaping people's lived experiences and their perceptions of themselves and the world,

retirement can produce significant changes in older adults' lives and, subsequently, a diverse

range of positive and negative experiences.

The present study defines retirement as a life transition that represents the formal

cessation of work in one's primary career but can also involve engaging in some alternative form

of work (Haslam et al., 2018, p.823). In framing their research, Haslam et al. highlight a volume

of research that contends this life transition involves a range of changes that affect retirees'

identity, economic recourses, daily activities and routines, and social networks (Haslam et al.,

p.823). However, Lobo et al. (2017) argue that due to the changing nature of roles and social

influences over time and across different settings and social contexts, retirement and the

significance placed on work are social constructs that vary significantly in their outcomes among

individuals and across different cultures (p.6). Therefore, as Newton's (2022) research of 152

older Canadian adults found, the experience of retirement is unique to each person, resulting in a

variety of heterogeneous experiences that are influenced by a wide range of social, cultural,

economic, and situational factors (p.92; Zhan et al., 2015, p.208).

For instance, exploring the relationship between retirement and life satisfaction, Ugwu et

al. (2024) performed a meta-analysis of data from 19 studies (p.3), encompassing a diverse

cultural and geographical scope including Africa, America, Australia, Europe, and Asia (p.9),

with sample sizes varying from 39 to 49,069 participants (p.10). Highlighting the heterogeneity

of people's post-retirement life satisfaction, of the 19 studies examined, 6 (32%) reported a

statistically significant positive relationship between retirement and life satisfaction, indicating

that retirement increased the satisfaction of life, while 9 (47%) found a negative relationship

between retirement and life satisfaction, and the remaining 4 (21%) studies did not find a

significant correlation between retirement and life satisfaction (Ugwu et al., p.10).

Where there is a positive correlation, Ugwu et al. (2024) found it is likely that retirement

can have a positive impact on life satisfaction because it allows individuals to focus on leisure

pursuits and personal interests, supporting the idea that retirement can be a time of fulfillment as

people can participate in activities that are meaningful to them (p.14). Therefore, these studies

indicate that having a well-planned retirement and adequate social support can increase

satisfaction (Ugwu et al., p.14). However, Ugwu et al. highlight that this positive outlook is not

universal as other studies show a negative correlation between retirement and life satisfaction

that appears related to anxiety about retirement that comes from financial instability, a sense of

identity loss, and feeling isolated (p.14). These factors can significantly affect retirees' emotional and mental health, underscoring the importance of extensive support networks (Ugwu et al., p.14).

Additionally, Ugwu et al. (2024) recognize the importance of health and physical activity in shaping one's satisfaction with retirement life, as shown in various research, indicating that possessing good health and taking part in regular physical exercises are positive influences for greater life contentment (p.14). These findings highlight the benefits of physical and social activity and its link with overall happiness, implying that being active in community activities can help reduce feelings of loneliness and a sense of lacking purpose (Ugwu et al., p.14). As such, further review of the literature expands on older adults' diverse experiences after leaving the workforce and the nuances that can impact older adults' view of themselves and the world after this transition.

2.6.1. Negative Outcomes of Retirement on Identity and Well-being

In their study, Moen and Fields (2002) analyzed data from the Cornell Retirement and Well-Being Study, which consisted of 762 American retirees and not-yet-retired older workers residing in four upstate New York cities (p.43). The researchers found that, for many people, retirement led to disruptions in their sense of identity through the loss of daily routines and social connections, often resulting in them experiencing feelings of marginalization (Moen & Fields, p.43). Similarly, Van Solinge and Henkens (2008) analyzed secondary data drawn from a panel study on retirement behavior in the Netherlands to explore how 778 people who had recently withdrawn from the labour force adjusted to and their level of satisfaction with retirement (p.431). Van Solinge and Henkens found the two main challenges that participants experience when retiring to be the adjustment to the loss of the work role and the social ties of work and the

development of a satisfactory postretirement lifestyle (Van Solinge & Henkens p.431). However, there were several mediating variables to satisfaction in retirement, including participants' access to financial resources, stable health, and marital relationships (Van Solinge & Henkens, p.431).

Taking a different approach, through interviews with a smaller but diverse sample of fourteen women residing in a suburban American city, Price (2000) found that, while these research participants described the retirement transition as relatively simple, they reported the loss of social contacts and the experience of ageist stereotypes that accompanied retirement painful in some respects (p.99). However, these challenges did not negatively affect these women's self-worth or personal identity, as they instead leaned on other existing social roles and found new social opportunities to discover meaningful interactions (Price, p.99). Although the present study does not explicitly advance a gendered analysis, these findings are increasingly relevant in that differing gendered experiences of aging and identity were found in this research, particularly as they relate to parenthood and identity, and we explore these experiences later in this text.

Other scholars demonstrate the difference in older adults' experiences when retiring voluntarily instead of involuntarily. For instance, while the previous sets of findings exist across those who retire both voluntarily and involuntarily, Van Solinge and Henkens's (2008) research highlights that not having a say in the timing of one's retirement increased these challenges, further hampering participant's adjustment to retirement, and hurt older adults' well-being and long-term quality of life (p.432). Similarly, Dingemans and Henkens's (2015) secondary analysis of the Work and Retirement Panel study produced by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute found that across 1615 older Dutch adults' involuntary retirement is related to decreases in self-efficacy and life satisfaction in later life relative to those who retire

voluntarily (p.20). However, although there is strong evidence to suggest that relinquishing one's work identity is a highly nuanced experience with the potential for negative consequences in older adults' lives, as Ugwu et al.'s (2024) meta-analysis demonstrates, there is also potential for positive retirement outcomes (p.10).

2.6.2. Positive Outcomes of Retirement on Identity and Well-Being

The present literature review also uncovered numerous studies highlighting the potential for positive experiences following older adults relinquishing their professional lives, demonstrating the ambivalent and complex relationship between work, retirement, and identity. For instance, Adawi et al. (2023) used the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS)–Healthy Aging data to investigate the relationship between life satisfaction and retirement in Canada (p.50). In their analysis of this cross-sectional data collected in 2008–2009 consisting of 30,865 participants from 10 Canadian provinces aged 45 years and older, Adawi et al. found that retirement has a significant positive correlation to the life satisfaction of older adults in Canada (p.50). Further, this positive correlation remained significant after controlling for age, gender, marital status, educational background, household income, race, immigrant status, and provincial fixed effects (Adawi et al., p.50). Interestingly, Adawi et al. found that men may be more likely to experience increased life satisfaction upon retiring than women (p.63). Additionally, although inconsequential in the decision to retire, a stronger sense of community belonging, more frequent social interaction, and participation in a variety of social activities (friendships, church, club, community, and charity), meant respondents were more satisfied in retirement (Adawi et al., p.62). To a less significant effect, time spent engaging in physical activities like walking, exercising, and gardening also appeared to affect life satisfaction in retirement positively (Adawi et al., p.62).

In support of these findings, Latif's (2010) analysis of data from the Canadian National Population Health Survey spanning 1994 through 2006 found that retirement positively impacts older adults' subjective happiness and improves psychological well-being (p.376). Further, the findings show that being married, having post-secondary education, health, income, and property ownership impact older adults' happiness, while urban location has a negative impact. (Latif, p.376). However, aligning with Adawi et al.'s findings, retirement's positive effects on psychological well-being were marginally higher for males than females (Latif, p.376). These two Canadian studies illustrate the potential for older adults to experience positive well-being outcomes after leaving the workforce, and other studies from Australia (Olds et al., 2018) and ten Western and Northern European countries (Belloni et al., 2016) support these findings. Additionally, although this positive correlation is strong among those aged 55 and older, it does not exist among the 45-54 age group, which may be because these people retired involuntarily, and as shown by Van Solinge and Henkens, and Dingemans and Henkens, experienced adverse outcomes in their psychological well-being (Latif, 2010, p.378).

2.6.3. Retirement Adaptation and Identity Maintenance

Investigating the reasons older adults in the UK continue working past the State Pension Age, Barnes et al. (2004) used a thorough screening process to fill predetermined quotas in building a balanced sample of 24 older adults from three geographical areas in London conducting in-depth interviews and discussion groups with these people (pp.7-9). Their research found several salient reasons participants continue working past the State Pension Age. These reasons included maintaining and expanding existing social networks, the financial security of continued income, taking advantage of good health, the perceived positive effects of staying active, and passing along knowledge and skills to the workforce (Barnes et al., p.40). These

reasons for older adults' continued participation in the workforce past the legislated retirement age are supported by Sewdas et al's (2017) research in the Netherlands, with an additional reason, purpose in life, presenting itself throughout participant interviews (p.9). For instance, a 67-year-old woman attests, "What I often see with peers of the same age is that after they have stopped working, they had no purpose in their life anymore and became more aware of their health problems" (Sewdas et al., p.5). Additionally, a 67-year-old man contends, "My second reason [for continuing work past State Pension Age] is to continue participating in society. When you are employed, you are part of the society. You are not standing on the sideline, which is something that happens when you are aging" (Sewdas et al., p.5). These interview excerpts demonstrate how these people find value in and justify working beyond the State Pension Age.

Throughout the review of relevant sociological literature relating to work, retirement, and identity, researchers have found several conscious or unconscious processes that help older adults adapt to this life transition and manage their self-concept. For instance, with a sample of 792 older adults in Switzerland, Teuscher (2010) used a questionnaire to explore how retired older adults' self-image differs from their employed counterparts (p.93). The author indicates that a particularly surprising finding from their research was that the professional domain was equally as crucial for retired and employed respondents in their self-descriptions, wherein many retired participants held onto their professional identity after retirement from their professional roles (Teuscher, p.102). Therefore, Teuscher found that retirement status does not predict professional identity but that the social status of the last or current job was the most influential factor in participants' self-descriptions (p.102). At the same time, the importance of retirement status in participants' self-definition were best predicted by positive attitudes toward aging and duration of employment before retirement (Teuscher, p.102). Finally, retired participants exhibited greater

identity diversity than their employed counterparts, which correlated with higher life satisfaction for retired participants (Teuscher, p.103).

These findings, aligning with existing sociological research regarding self-complexity (Linville, 1987; Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002), suggest that identity diversity may function as an adaptive mechanism wherein there is a greater capacity for positive self-conception when some aspect of older adults' identity is precarious (Teuscher, 2010, p.103). Therefore, Teuscher (2010) argues that the continuation of professional identity after retirement is not an inability to adapt to the life change of retirement but the maintenance of positive past identities to form a more diverse self-image (p.104). This idea of identity diversity acting as a mechanism of adaptation to retirement receives support from Haslam et al. (2018), whose survey of 302 older adults in Australia and New Zealand indicates that new social group membership can be a crucial resource in maintaining positive self-conception upon entering retirement (p.834) – a finding since reproduced in a more recent study (Haslam, 2019, p.116). However, it is essential to note that the adaptive effects of identity diversity only function as such if a person effectively identifies with these other, sometimes new, social groups and not through simply mundane interaction (Michinov et al., 2008, p.188; Teuscher, 2010, p.91).

For example, as Michinov et al. (2008) found through their survey of 154 retired people in France, retirees can represent a social group for meaningful interaction in retirement, leading to increasingly positive well-being and life satisfaction (p.188; Haslam et al., 2018, p.834; Teuscher, 2010, p.91). However, importantly, to identify with the social group of retirees, a person must hold a positive view of older age, being that this life stage is often synonymous with retirement (Michinov et al., p.188; Teuscher, p.91) – a stance that Teuscher argues is often atypical among aged people in middle to high income nations (p.90). Therefore, the studies

discussed in this section indicate that by connecting deeply with existing and new social groups, older adults can increase the likelihood of avoiding adverse outcomes in post-retirement self-conception and well-being.

2.7. Capitalism and the Potential for Change

The dominant economic system in Canada and most other middle to high income nations, capitalism, is composed of three fundamental processes – production, distribution, and consumption – that are interdependent and shaped by the fact that they are parts of a dynamic system (Smelser & Swedberg, 2005, p.426). From a Marxian perspective, capitalism is an economic model that renders the majority of goods essential to sustaining modern life as commodities for purchase through which their exchange for currency results in profit for the owners of production (Pirgmaier, 2020, p.275). This consumption of goods and subsequent distribution of profits impacts our interactions and relationships with others and society's institutions (Pirgmaier, p.275). Consequently, capitalism functions as a social structure wherein individuals are inherently motivated to exploit one another - it manifests throughout social relations as a hierarchical power dynamic where those at the top exercise their power to dominate and control society (Pirgmaier, p.279). Therefore, these processes permeate all domains of the social world and, as Smelser and Swedberg (2005) argue, manifest unjustly in people's lives and unevenly across various social groups (p.426).

For instance, social scientists have long been critical of the nature of distribution, which occurs through market exchange and on an oppressively unequal basis (Smelser & Swedberg, 2005, p. 426), ultimately producing a plethora of negative outcomes in society, such as inequality across class, age, gender, race, ability, and geographic boundaries (p.420). At the same time, through the capitalist economic system, production, or work, plays a central role in determining

an individual's identity by affording social status and prestige, wherein capitalist society equates success with material terms, rewarding and assessing people according to their economic achievements (Manor, 2017, p.986). Since these cultural imperatives of capitalism in many industrialized nations evaluate people in terms of productivity and independence, there is an erosion of worth among those who may not meet these standards – one social group in particular who experience this marginalization being older adults (Liang et al., 2012, p.329).

This devaluation of older adults' identities, otherwise known as ageism, is easily observed throughout aging discourse and subsequent media portrayals of older age in society, wherein the process of aging is generally framed in negative terms, defined as successful or not, seen as a detriment to productivity, and a matter of individual choice and responsibility (Nahon-Serfaty et al., 2013, p.27; Liang et al., 2012, p.329). Consequently, this distortedly negative view of older age permeates many other structures and institutors in society, such as the government, wherein we have seen the legislation of fixed-age mandatory retirement, ultimately leaving some older adults with no choice but to face increasingly detrimental economic and social outcomes (Moody & Sasser, 2012, p.10; Dingemans & Henkens, 2015; Van Solinge & Henkens, 2008). Interestingly, social scientists argue that this puts older adults in a double bind: when they decide to stop working, people see them as a drain on society and a threat to a healthy economy; when they choose to continue working, they are subject to unfavourable comparisons with younger coworkers (Nahon-Serfaty et al., 2013, p.28; Liang et al., 2012, p.329). To make matters worse, many of the mainstream's supposed efforts to counter ageism are advanced in terms of successful or non-successful, active or inactive, or just simply "anti" aging, which, through mechanisms of consumerism, feeds back into the capitalist economic system at the root of this ageist marginalization (Liang et al., 2012, p.329).

However, even through the myopic lens of judging people by their productivity, older adults are productive in many different ways, be it through workforce participation or in more socially reproductive activities such as housework, family caregiving, and volunteer roles (Moody & Sasser, 2012, p.413). For instance, citing a comprehensive study of a nationally representative sample of 3,000 older adults in the United States by Louis Harris and Associates in 1991, Moody and Sasser highlight that three-quarters of older adults are engaged in productive activities, with 27% in paid employment, 26% volunteering, 42% helping children or grandchildren, and 29% assisting people in their social networks who were sick or had disabilities (Moody & Sasser, p.414). Furthermore, the study indicates that Americans over age 55 are a neglected national resource, with the combined value of their societal contributions equaling that of nearly 12 million full-time workers and their caregiving activities alone equating to the work of over 7 million full-time employees (Moody & Sasser, p.414). However, since capitalism on a fundamental level is about producing commodities for consumption on the market, in our society, value is exclusively attributed to paid activities, while non-paid activities, such as reproductive or care labour are rendered effectively valueless (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.2). This evidence challenges ageist, capital-oriented notions of older adults as unproductive, raising questions of whether a departure from modern capitalism may liberate older adults from the inequality embedded in current social structures and recognize the value of their societal contributions within and outside economic activities.

Throughout sociological literature, there have long been calls for an upheaval of the current economic structures, advocating for varying notions of a "post-capitalist" economic system (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.1). However, the scholarly viewpoints on moving beyond growth-oriented capitalist ways of organizing society differ significantly in recognizing

and evaluating potential outcomes and likelihoods (Schmid, 2019, p.7). Despite there being no precise consensus regarding how this reimagined economy would look, post-capitalist literature primarily contains critical theoretical debates advocating for the de-commodification of labor, recognition of socially reproductive labor, and diverse forms of value contribution to society (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.8).

For instance, arguing for the abandonment of the growth-oriented economic model and a move toward the decommodification of labor, Schmid (2019) synthesizes substantive qualitative and quantitative research (Easterlin, 1974; Rosa & Henning, 2018; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) which demonstrates that economic metrics such as GDP do not correlate with well-being in society above a certain point, discrediting the idea that these idealized metrics are indicative of social prosperity (p.3). Therefore, several social scientists (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; Schmid, 2019; Vincent & Brandellero, 2023) advocate for a complete divergence from a production-focused economy to the idea of a cooperativist system such as a sharing economy or a community economy. In such an economic organization, pooling and sharing resources among a population of people would eliminate personal ownership, moving society away from fixating on hyper-production and hyper-consumption, providing a more equitable distribution of resources that emphasizes the collective good and diminishes exploitation (Peticca-Harris et al., p.31; Schmid, p.6). As an alternative to the capitalist economic system, Peticca-Harris et al. suggest that this collaborative economic network might comprise activities such as worker cooperatives, community gardens, food, home, and renewable energy cooperatives, and a variety of other forms of collective ownership and management (p.30). Further, exchange within such a cooperativist network might often be characterized by casual, spontaneous one-time transactions, non-monetary payments, agreements that rely on the local availability of goods and services,

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horizontal large-scale infrastructure including multiple stakeholders, regulatory bodies and government (Peticca-Harris et al., p.32; Schmid, 2019, p.6). However, while these proposals for such a cooperativist reconfiguration of economic and social relations represent a positive advancement from capitalism, these ideas are not without their criticisms either (Celata & Stabrowski, 2022).

Other scholars theorize about a post-capitalist society from a more traditional perspective. For instance, Vincent & Brandellero (2023) discuss the idea of an economic system where workers are responsible for controlling the means of production and the distribution of surplus, suggesting that this is a step toward escaping exploitation and creating increasingly humane work environments that offer more intrinsically rewarding work, more free time, and subsequently less alienation (P.6). In demonstrating the liberating potential of an economic democracy, Vincent & Brandellero offer the example of a democratically ran Argentinian company, where within this cooperative, most decisions are collectively arbitrated upon by the workers (Vincent & Brandellero, p.6). In this case study, the workers express that this is one aspect they value most about their job, as they gain a sense of autonomy and, at the same time, feel responsible for what they are doing and how their decisions impact everyone involved (Vincent & Brandellero, p.6). Schmid (2019) highlights the positive potential of such a shift toward horizontal types of place-based organizing, which do not just shift from top–down to bottom-up approaches, by challenging vertical societal structuring and prioritizes relational perspectives (p.9). Therefore, this democratic economic system fosters enhanced personal and collective responsibility and a non-monetary ethos wherein workers have chosen to remain with the company when having opportunities for higher pay elsewhere because of their affective involvement in the collective (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.6). However, as with notions of a

cooperativist economic organization, it is crucial to recognize that there are skeptics regarding the capacity of democratic economic systems to bring about the liberating social outcomes that post-capitalist theorists idealize (Bolton, 2020, p.339).

Nonetheless, as can be seen in the varying ideas regarding the possibilities for a post-capitalist society, the 'post' represents the notion of 'alternative' economic structures that transcends capitalism as we know it (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020, p.332). Further, they challenge the notion of capitalism as the only legitimate economic system by highlighting the potential for a variety of provisioning and (re)productive practices that may serve to liberate those who are marginalized by these unjust economic structures, acknowledging different strategies for an alternative socioeconomic future that range from a desire to disrupt the system entirely to working within existing institutions (Schmid, 2019, p.6). While somewhat ambiguous, these theoretical discussions provide a foundation for arguing that some form of a post-capitalist society, with its potential for diverse valuation of contributions, decreased social inequality, and enhanced autonomy may be beneficial to older adults as they make meaning out of later life.

2.8. Literature Review Conclusion

This review of relevant sociological theory and empirical evidence relating to older adults' aging experiences, their identities, and the role their socioeconomic status plays in this relationship shows that a diverse range of opportunities and challenges arise as people navigate later in life. One of the most prominent issues is the way industrial capitalist nations construct age, life stages, and the narratives that surround these concepts, which ultimately manifest in the relationship between older adults and their work lives. For instance, these social structures can result in age-based discrimination, displacement from meaningful social roles, and a loss of valuable social connections for older adults as they leave the workforce. Other older adults

discover different ways to adapt to these challenges, opening a new chapter in life for self-discovery and purpose beyond the workforce. While the literature demonstrates that these outcomes associated with older age, work, and identity vary significantly across cultures, this review illustrates the usefulness of sociological lenses such as activity theory and continuity theory, which help us form an understanding of these ambiguous experiences. In the following chapters, we present the current study's findings and explore them in relation to the relevant literature covered in this section.

Chapter 3: Data and Research Methods

The objective of this research is to explore how older adults residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, from varied socioeconomic backgrounds experience the aging process in relation to their identity. It aims to uncover how they perceive and manage their identity within the context of industrial capitalist narratives and norms of older age and how these experiences shape their lives. To achieve this goal, I conducted qualitative research from September to January 2024 to develop rich, descriptive firsthand accounts of the intersection of aging, identity, socioeconomic status, and industrial capitalist conceptions of older adulthood.

The primary method of data collection used in this research was semi-structured qualitative interviews. Additionally, I asked participants to complete a brief demographic questionnaire following our interview, allowing me to contextualize their social positioning and analyze their responses in relation to these characteristics. In total, seventeen participants were interviewed and completed the brief demographical questionnaire. The following sections describe the study population, recruitment methods, data collection process, analytical approach, and the limitations of this research design.

3.1. Study Population

The study population of this research included any person 65 years or older who resided in the Halifax Regional Municipality. There are two main reasons for demarcating this study population. First, in line with the rest of Canada, the population of people in Nova Scotia who are 65 years and older is projected to grow by nearly 35% over the next twenty years, with people aged 85 and older more than doubling (Statistics Canada, 2022). Further, studies indicate that the size of the older adult population in Nova Scotia and the rest of Atlantic Canada currently exceeds that of the national average, and this gap will continue to expand over the next

two decades (CIHI, 2017). Because most analyses and public policies treat this demographic and their experiences as homogenous, the heterogeneity of the aging experience among this historically fast-growing population must be appropriately understood so that any necessary adjustments in social policy and structure are informed to help ensure older adults in this region feel valued society and have equal opportunity to do so. Therefore, a gap exists in the literature regarding studies that explore whether socioeconomic position translates into the older population's subjective thoughts about the aging process and how they view themselves in society. Finally, due to my geographic location as the researcher, studying older adults in HRM is the most accessible way of reaching this demographic.

3.2. Recruitment Methods

To arrive at my sample population, I located the participants using two principal methods. First, I posted recruitment flyers in areas older adults may frequent, such as near supermarkets, pharmacies, walking trails, bus stops, and community recreational facilities. When posting these recruitment flyers, I targeted various areas across HRM to increase my chances of achieving a socioeconomically diverse sample.

Second, I employed snowball sampling by offering my initial participants a recruitment flyer that they could share with individuals within their social network who fit the criteria for this study. Snowball sampling is a non-random sampling method facilitated by the referral of people who qualify for my research from the network of my initial participants (Bernard, 2017, p.190). Therefore, since people are likely to associate with others from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, I was weary of relying too heavily on this recruitment method to avoid compromising the diversity of my sample.

Nonetheless, most of my sample ended up being recruited through snowball sampling. However, to help avoid the pitfall noted above, I limited each participant to a maximum of two referrals and, in some cases, omitted interview prospects at my discretion if I believed they were too similar in socioeconomic background to existing participants to ensure I heard a wider variety of older adults' experiences of aging in relation to their identities.

3.3. Sample Characteristics

Using these recruitment approaches, I assembled a sample that exhibits some social diversity. For instance, the seventeen participants in this study range in age from 65 to 85, with an average age of just over 69 and a median age of 70. Therefore, in terms of central tendency in the age distribution in my sample, it is relatively balanced. Of the seventeen participants, nine identified as male, and eight as female. Although not directly queried, nearly all participants explicitly or implicitly identified as 'heterosexual', except one male who indicated he was gay.

Similarly, without explicit inquiry, one participant disclosed a chronic physical disability, while nine others discussed coping with various acute health issues. Geographically, three participants originated from the Middle East (Lebanon), and the remaining fourteen were born and raised in Canada. Notably, several Canadian-born participants relocated to Nova Scotia from various regions nationwide. I used a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) as an entry point to this information, before encouraging participants to elaborate further during the interview process. Finally, ten of seventeen participants were retired at the time of this research. Considering these characteristics, while my research's study sample is relatively diverse, it skews toward those who are educated and of middle-to-higher income. Nonetheless, this sample provides a range of insights into older adults' identities and their unique experiences of aging, with specific relevance for future research on this topic among middle-to-higher income older

adults and those in or near retirement. The following table lists the pseudonyms I assigned to each participant and the characteristics associated with each person.

Participant	Age	Gender	Birth Country	Education	Employment	Income	SES Score
Georges	65	Male	Lebanon	Trade School	Full Time	25k-50k	4
Tony	85	Male	Lebanon	Masters	Retired	25k-50k	6
Alexander	65	Male	Canada	Bachelorate	Full Time	50k-100k	6
Eli	70	Male	Lebanon	Doctorate	Retired	100k-200k	9
Grace	75	Female	Canada	Associates	Retired	25k-50k	4
John	65	Male	Canada	Some college	Retired	50k-100k	6
Amelia	65	Female	Canada	Masters	Full Time	50k-100k	7
Charlotte	66	Female	Canada	Bachelorate	Retired	50k-100k	6
Isaac	75	Male	Canada	Trade School	Full Time	100k-200k	6
Hannah	71	Female	Canada	Some college	Part Time	25k-50k	4
Beatrice	71	Female	Canada	Bachelorate	Retired	25k-50k	5
Christopher	73	Male	Canada	High shcool	Retired	25k-50k	3
Diana	70	Female	Canada	Bachelorate	Full Time	50k-100k	6
Henry	71	Male	Canada	Masters	Retired	100k-200k	7
Mark	65	Male	Canada	Some college	Full Time	25k-50k	4
Fiona	68	Female	Canada	Doctorate	Retired	200k+	10
Eleanor	66	Female	Canada	Doctorate	Retired	100k-200k	9

3.4. Participant Interviews

Throughout my fieldwork, I conducted seventeen semi-structured interviews with my sample population ranging from thirty minutes to an hour in duration. These interviews consisted of twelve primary open-ended questions, with several of these questions including optional prompts for further probing depending on the depth and direction of participants' responses. I assembled these principal questions and optional prompts in an interview guide (Appendix B) to help structure the interview process for flow and efficiency. However, throughout the interview process, I frequently adjusted the wording and sequence of questions based on the natural progression of the conversation. When participants offered compelling perspectives on a particular topic, I posed additional off-script questions to explore that area further. This flexible approach allowed interviewees to elaborate on subjects that held personal significance to them as older adults. Based on the participants' preferences, these interviews were conducted via Zoom

or in casual public settings. These public settings include the Halifax shopping mall food court, the Halifax public library, and several Tim Hortons locations across HRM. To ensure that I could thoroughly analyze the data collected from these interviews, I gained permission from participants to use an audio recording device to capture our dialogue.

There are several justifications for my decision to use these research methods. First, interviews are best suited to thoroughly explore the "how," "what," and "why" of my study subjects' subjective experiences at the intersection of aging and identity (Bernard, 2017, p.167). Second, semi-structured interviews provide a similar degree of free-flowing dialogue as unstructured interviews but with an increased degree of interview control through the use of an interview guide (Bernard, p.212). With the increased control gained by structuring questions and prompts in the interview guide, I ensured I remembered essential themes and questions that may have otherwise evaded me during the interview process (Bernard, p.213). However, at the same time, this approach provides leeway to facilitate rapport, veer off, ask follow-up questions, and dig deeper into any tangents that my interlocutors expressed in their responses, all while retaining the ability to revert to the interview questions I curated in my interview guide when the time was appropriate (Bernard, p.213). Finally, since I used interviews as the primary data collection method in my undergraduate thesis research on aging populations, I had a high degree of confidence in my capacity to effectively utilize this methodological approach to achieve a reliable qualitative dataset.

3.5. Demographic Questionnaire

After assigning a pseudonym to each participant to ensure anonymity, I asked them to fill out a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) as an additional research tool. This questionnaire aims to acquire information on participants' age, gender identity, race, heritage,

employment status, highest level of education, and annual household income. The questionnaire assesses participants' socioeconomic status and facilitates comparisons of their responses concerning various social characteristics. By gaining this information about my research participants, I can enhance my contextual understanding of the interview data, particularly to discern whether individuals from specific groups hold notably different perceptions and experiences compared to those from other groups.

3.6. Data Analysis

After collecting this qualitative data, I transcribed the interview transcripts from the audio recording device and took an inductive approach to data analysis. This approach was most appropriate for my research as the literature review gave me a general idea of the more prominent themes in this area, which I then analyzed and related to my findings (Bernard, 2017, p.492). At the same time, this approach provides flexibility to discover new strands that emerge from my participants' responses (Bernard, 2017, p.492).

To identify emerging themes in my data, I took an open coding approach by repeatedly combing through the interview transcripts and situating the findings into recurrent thematic categories so that I could form an understanding of and identify unique individual experiences and try to understand better why they might occur before drawing potential connections and contradictions between these findings and the pre-existing literature (Bernard, 2017, p.493).

Finally, using the data I obtained from the demographic questionnaire, I created a composite measure of socioeconomic status through which I could use as a lens to analyze and compare the common themes uncovered in my research on an individual and group basis relative to their socioeconomic status and other social characteristics. To arrive at this composite measure of socioeconomic status, I followed the lead of Nutakor et al. (2023), combining annual income

with years of post-secondary education (p.3). This composite score was created by laying out

five categories based on the highest level of education obtained by the respondents, ranked from

lowest to highest based on the typical number of years required to complete each education level.

These categories began with those who have completed high school or equivalent, some

college/trade school/associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate (Nutakor

et al., p.3). Similarly, I categorized household income into five groups that ranged from the

lowest to the highest income brackets listed in the same fashion as in the questionnaire (Nutakor

et al., p.3). Subsequently, I merged the pair of values to arrive at the composite socioeconomic

status score wherein the total socioeconomic status score ranged from 1 to 10, with higher scores

indicating higher socioeconomic status (Nutakor et al., p.3).

  To justify my decision to measure socioeconomic status in this manner, Oakes and Rossi

(2003) outline a history of approaches used to measure socioeconomic status and argue that there

is no consensus or "best" route to doing so (p.781). However, the researchers contend that

composite measures capture more context than a simple univariate approach (Oakes & Rossi,

p.781). Therefore, it is suitable to measure socioeconomic status in a composite form (Oakes &

Rossi, p.781). While I considered including occupational prestige in this composite score, the

authors express skepticism about using prestige scores because of their subjectivity and

subsequent unreliability (Oakes & Rossi, p.772). Therefore, I went with a combination of what

Antonoplis (2023) identifies as the two most common and objective indicators – education and

income (p.277). Conveniently, the data I acquired through my questionnaire can most accurately

satisfy the variables of this composite measure, and I believe this approach functions adequately

for the purpose of my analysis. Following these analytical procedures, I developed this thesis's

primary argument, supported by my research's three most salient themes.

What is your annual household income?	What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Scored on years of post-secondary education)
(1) Less than $25,000	(1) High school degree or equivalent/no college (0 years)
(2) $25,000 - $50,000	(2) Some college, no degree; Trade school, Associates degree (1-2 years)
(3) $50,000 - $100,000	(3) Bachelor's degree (4-5 years)
(4) $100,000 - $200,000	(4) Master's degree (6-7 years)
(5) More than $200,000	(5) Doctorate (8+ years)

3.7. Ethical Consideration

Finally, it was important to consider the ethical concerns and possible risks involved with participating in my research. While I had confidence that the procedures involved in my research were ethical and that the risks or discomforts associated with my study were unlikely to surpass those incurred in day-to-day life, this was confirmed upon receiving approval from Dalhousie University's Research Ethics Board. However, I took three further steps to ensure my participants' confidence in this.

First, each participant received an informed consent form (Appendix C) highlighting the Research Ethics Board's approval, which included my research supervisor and my personal contact information. Next, as stated in the informed consent form, at the outset of each interview, I verbally reassured participants that I would remove all identifying information from the interview notes, transcripts, and my findings to ensure confidentiality. Next, I assigned each participant a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Additionally, to mitigate any risk or discomfort that participants may encounter throughout this research, at the outset of the interviews, I

reminded participants of their continued ability to pause the interview, stop the interview entirely, or refrain from answering any questions they do not wish to respond at any point throughout the interview. Finally, after each interview, I again reminded participants that should any feelings of vulnerability arise following the interview conclusion, they could choose to have some, or all their data withdrawn from the research up to two weeks after the interview date. Through this sequence of precautionary steps, my research upheld the Research Ethics Board's standards, and I was able to avoid any instances of perceived risk or expressed discomfort from my participants.

3.8. Limitations

Before presenting the findings of this qualitative research, I must acknowledge two significant limitations of this study which include the sampling methods and potential interpretation bias. Most importantly, I recognize that a sample size of seventeen participants is insufficient to make any precise assumptions about the broader population of older adults across HRM. Additionally, I acknowledge that the recruitment method of snowball sampling does not provide a wholly randomized sample. Therefore, my data does not represent the vast array of identities that older adults experience. I recognize that my sample does not include any black participants, Indigenous participants, and no one living in assisted living facilities – all demographics that may add significant variation to my findings. Moreover, it is essential to underscore the qualitative nature of this study, which employs an interpretive methodology to extract meaningful information from the collected data. This approach, while potentially introducing bias, also allows for a nuanced understanding of the experiences of older adults in HRM. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that the primary aim of this research is not to provide a conclusive or exhaustive ruling on how socioeconomic status affects the aging experience and identity of older adults in HRM. Instead, the focus was on exploring their experiences of aging in

relation to identity, a perspective that has the potential to illuminate the heterogeneity of this

rapidly growing demographic. This research could serve as a catalyst for a critical dialogue about

the adequacy and equitability of public policies and social structures, prompting necessary

changes to benefit the livelihoods of older adults.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I describe the findings from the interview data collected in my qualitative research. As discussed in the previous section, these interviews aimed to explore how older adults from various socioeconomic backgrounds residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, experience the aging process in relation to their identity. Further, the interviews sought to gain insight into how these people perceive themselves and manage their identity within the context of industrial capitalist narratives and norms of older age, as well as how these experiences shape their lives.

I begin by describing my research findings in the form of the key themes that I have identified across the interview transcripts. In the next chapter, I open a critical discussion that develops a more thorough understanding of the findings and explores what these findings might tell us about how these older adults identify with the aging process, how the findings relate to existing literature on the subject, and the implications of these findings in policy and practice.

From my perspective, these research findings suggest that a societal shift toward some form of post-capitalism could be beneficial to the identity and well-being of older adults in Canadian society. Three main themes arose from my data that support this argument. These themes include the enduring connection between work and older adults' identity, the impact of retirement on older adults' sense of self, and the broader social and cultural contexts that influence these experiences.

4.1. The Enduring Connection Between Work and Identity

At the outset of the interviews conducted in this research, I probed participants with a series of questions aimed at uncovering how important their age is to their identity, how they view themselves relative to their age, and what other aspects of their lives are essential to their

sense of self, with attention to how socioeconomic status might influence these experiences. Aligning with the findings of my Honours research, participants quickly downplayed the significance of their chronological age in how they view themselves, insisting it has little bearing on their self-concept and distancing themselves from that number toward a younger age identity (Pike, 2022, p.20). Further, there was frequent mention of family, health, and physical activities holding meaningful positions in their understanding of themselves at this life stage (Pike, p.17). However, perhaps the most intriguing and common observation I made throughout these interviews is how consistently these conversations naturally reoriented toward discussions of the significance of work in these people's lives and sense of self.

Throughout the interviews, I did not directly prompt participants to discuss work, yet their responses continually returned to this topic and its relevance to their identity. Interestingly, this trend appeared across the board among lower to higher socioeconomic status participants. From my perspective, this indicates that for the participants in my research, more significant than the influence of one's age is the enduring connection between their identities and the work they are currently engaged in or were engaged in throughout their lives before retirement. Participants expressed the enduring nature of this relationship through a deep affinity for the passion their professional lives provide them and a reluctance to separate from these roles despite societal narratives and social norms suggesting they should.

Of the seventeen participants in my study, sixteen directly or indirectly spoke about their jobs and careers to varying extents, even though they were never directly prompted to discuss this topic. Through these frequent and often passionate discussions of participants' employment and professional work histories, it became clear that my research was beginning to organically

reorient itself toward the significant effect that this aspect of participants' lives has on how they understand themselves as aging individuals in Canadian society.

4.1.1. Identity and Continued Employment

Five of the seven participants who remain in the workforce either implicitly or explicitly expressed that they continue to work because of the fulfillment and purpose it brings to their lives. For instance, Alexander, a 65-year-old man, was asked how important his age is to his identity. He quickly dismissed his age as an important factor and instead hastily diverted the conversation to discussing the significance of his work in how he understands himself and the world around him as he ages. He explained,

> Well, I've always said, and my parents are the same way too - age is just a number. I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up. So that's my attitude toward my age. But I need to tell you, I think the most important thing for me is being able to maintain that youthful attitude toward things because of my work and the environment that I continue to work in.

As a manager at a restaurant just outside of Halifax's downtown core, he felt that his job acted as a positive influence on how he experienced the aging process, and as a byproduct of that, how he viewed himself. He insisted, "It keeps you engaged. You're being physically active, and you're being mentally active […] I think those two things are fundamentally important in how you feel about yourself." Further, he attested to being reluctant to let go of this aspect of his life at a time when many people his age typically do. He affirmed, "Most of the contemporaries my age are getting ready to retire, or they already have. I'm not quite ready to do that. So, I'm just going to keep going until I can't go anymore." However, he acknowledged that being single and childless played into his ability to make this decision, and he was grateful to have this agency, assuring,

"If I were married, or had a partner, or children, it would be certainly different. But I'm just me. So that's another very fortunate thing in my life is that I'm able to make this decision."

Similarly, Diana, a 70-year-old woman who has spent the last five decades working as a flight attendant, expressed how much more tightly woven her career is into her identity than her age. When asked about the importance of her age and what aspects of her life are most important to her identity, she revealed, "I don't think about my age whatsoever […] of course my family and friendships have shaped who I am, but truly a big part is my work." She proceeded to explain why this is, insisting, "Most people don't get to live a different life like I do since I don't come to and from home every day […] I leave, and I'm gone for a while. That's a big part of who I am." She continued to describe the enduring nature of the relationship she has with her work and the reluctance she feels toward retiring. She told me that as she approached 65, the age generally associated with retirement in Canada, she felt pressured to retire. She explained,

> A few years before I got there, that was eliminated by the Canadian labor laws, right? So now, I don't have a date in mind. I'm thinking easily a couple more years. Then it just really depends on if I'm feeling like I can't do the work, or if it's too tiring physically or mentally.

However, she acknowledged that she does consider the needs of her family when facing this decision, contending, "My daughter is having another baby next month. So, in two years' time, she might be able to use me more for her needs." Despite affirming that she is financially stable enough to retire if she wanted to and that she's cognizant of the benefits her retirement may have for her daughter, she maintained, "It's going to be very difficult to make that decision to step away." However, although these two participants, among others, expressed a fondness for their professional lives and reluctance to leave them behind, it is important to acknowledge that this

attitude toward work is not a homogeneous experience across all participants who remain in the workforce.

While five participants expressed a passion for their ongoing career engagement, this was not the case for everyone. Two participants described their continued participation in the workforce as less of an enduring affinity for their work itself and more due to a lack of financial stability that prevents them from retiring at this time. For example, Georges, a 65-year-old Lebanese man who works as a hairdresser in Halifax, expressed concerns about the economic climate in Canada and a cautious hopefulness about becoming financially stable enough to retire in the coming years. In broken English, he confessed,

> Well, the economy here and in Canada now is down. So, to be honest, I don't have any
>
> idea about the future. I'm worried about my retirement. I worry about the people in older
>
> old age because you see a lot of homeless in Canada, especially since I was in Halifax.
>
> That's a big issue now. You know, so everybody is talking about this retirement at 70.
>
> That won't happen for at least another five years. But I hope I can retire in the future.

Nonetheless, these sentiments regarding the significant role that work plays in participants' lives and how it seems to be more central than age in terms of how they view themselves in the world were echoed by most participants who were still engaged in paid work. However, this centrality of participants' work to their identity and their reluctance to separate from their careers was common among those who have left the workforce as well.

4.1.2. Identity Beyond the Workforce

Of the ten retired participants, seven exhibited a comparable enthusiasm toward the importance of their professional histories in their personal identities. For instance, Eli, a 70-year-

old male who devoted his professional life to working in medicine as a urologist and a surgeon, argued that although he is now retired, he still sees himself as a surgeon. He insisted,

> My identity is that I'm a urologist, kidney transplant surgeon, who's now 70. That's my identity, and I don't even like to think of the fact that I'm a retired surgeon. I just don't do surgeries anymore. So, I guess I'm also a layperson now, right?

Again, there is a reluctance to relinquish the identity associated with the professional role this participant spent his life fulfilling, even though he is no longer employed in such a role. Comparable to the participants I previously discussed, his decision to step away from his career was met with hesitancy, and he actually re-entered the workforce for a period of time. He admitted, "So the first year of retirement, I went back and worked half-time because I wasn't able to adjust." Like several other retired participants, this man explicitly expressed the centrality of his professional identity to his sense of self and discussed this to a much greater extent than the brief mention of his age despite no longer being employed in the professional role.

Similarly, Fiona, a 68-year-old woman, was quick to dismiss the significance of her age before beginning to divulge her affinity for her career as a pediatrician, its impact on who she is, and how a tragic life event made her deviate from her plan of continuing to work for years to come. She explained,

> I loved my job […] my career is part of who I am today. But after my sister's death, I thought, 'There's another chapter in my life that I need to pay attention to.' But I could have stayed and worked for many more years and certainly was capable of it.

Now retired for nearly four years, she continued by recognizing the hesitancy she and her peers experienced when debating moving on from their professional roles, but that after the loss of her sister, she left without any indecision. She said,

I know a number of my colleagues have sort of tiptoed away from work one step at a time and then back, you know, working part-time. But after my sister passed, I just didn't. I just cut it, and at 65, I walked away. So, it wasn't because of my age.

Therefore, although many participants expressed a strong connection with their work and a hesitancy to distance themselves from this aspect of their lives, each participant's experience was relatively fluid and affected by many personal and life circumstances influencing their decision to remain engaged in these professional roles.

On the other hand, while many participants distanced themselves from the influence of age on their self-concept, instead emphasizing the strong ties between their work and identity, others recognized the effects that older age and the norms associated with this life stage have on their sense of self. For example, John, a 65-year-old man who worked at the Halifax International Airport for the last three decades, acknowledged the nuances of understanding the aging self once you become a "senior" because this life stage typically coincides with retirement. Therefore, he argued that it can be challenging to decipher which is having the most impact on his changing self-concept. He declared,

It's really a kicker when you retire. See, there are two different things going on for me - turning 65 and retiring. It kind of hit me on both […] So, when I'm talking, it's hard to distinguish between what I'm experiencing because I'm 65, now I'm supposed to be this old person, or because I've just retired.

Unlike the many participants who were hesitant to retire, he explained that he didn't think twice about leaving the workforce once he was eligible for full Canada pension benefits, saying, "I waited till I was 65, and I was gone right then."

Therefore, each participant had their nuanced ways of describing the extent to which their work and careers are crucial to their identity. However, in most cases, this aspect of their lives was at the center of many of their self-assessments and was acknowledged equally as much as or significantly more than the effect of their age on how they view themselves. Insofar as while participants either implicitly or explicitly expressed several reasons for the significant role that their professional lives have in who they are, including the structure it brings to their lives and the passion they have for their work, the most salient reason appears to be the social aspects of their work.

4.1.3. Social Networks and Social Interaction

Of the reasons participants indicated that work is so critical to their sense of self, the social aspects of work were the most prominent. With ten of seventeen participants describing the significance that the social nature of work holds in their identities, these sentiments were echoed across socioeconomic lines and in those still employed and in retirement. The most common ways that work-related social interaction plays a positive role in participants' identities is through an increased sense of comradery, the opportunity to serve as a mentor, and reaffirming their sense of self against stereotypes of older age.

For instance, Mark, a 65-year-old man who works as a concierge at an apartment building in downtown Halifax conveyed how the camaraderie he gains from his job is so important to him and acknowledged the positive effects it may have on his wellbeing at this stage of his life. He confessed,

> I love to socialize with the people. And they say social interactions are the biggest things, especially for older people. You know, being social instead of being alone. So, I love that aspect and I consider that building my home away from home.

He continued by indicating that due to the value these work-related social connections bring to his life, he has no plans to leave that behind soon. He contended,

> It's a great fit for me. I know everybody likes me, and I like everybody, you know? The residents are like my second family. I just thrive on that. So, I'll continue that on for a while yet before I even think of retirement.

Similarly, while not regretful of his decision, John reflects on how he became removed from a meaningful and longstanding social network upon entering retirement. He reveals, "I used to do shift work, so a lot of the social stuff I got from people I worked with is gone. I knew people there for 30 years; I'd have breaks and lunches with them, you know." Acknowledging how losing these longstanding outlets for social interaction might affect relationships at home for some people, he adds, "So, after you retire, you really have to be able to get along with your spouse, right?" followed by a lighthearted laugh.

Other participants had already left the workforce before recognizing an absence of social interaction in their lives and reversing course to regain the meaningful role that social affairs have in their identities. One example of this is with Hannah, a 70-year-old woman who reveals that although she decided to retire several years ago, she recently opted to re-enter the workforce to regain the social engagement offered to her through employment. She explains, "I'm a people person. That's why I went back to work at the community hall. Because sitting at home doing nothing, I realized I lost that social piece." Further, she described a certain reliability to these work-related social interactions, stating how she had sought out senior-focused community groups to satisfy this social element missing in her life since retirement, but that due to the nature of these groups, they did not fulfill her needs.

While many participants spent time emphasizing the value of social interaction they derive from their work life, there were several cases where participants noted that it is not just the social engagement that is important to their identities but socializing with diverse demographics in particular. For example, Alexander emphasized the privilege of the cross-demographic interactions in his work environment of managing a local restaurant. He elucidated,

> I'm surrounded by people that are generationally younger than I am. I'm older than most of the parents of the kids that I work with. So, it allows me to interact multi generationally, and it allows me to have discourse with them on myriad subjects. So, I've got feet in two different pools, I interact a lot with people that are of my era but then I also have the really great privileges of working with people that are substantially younger than me.

He continued by describing how his multi-generational social network affords the role of being a mentor to some of his coworkers, which is a fulfilling experience for his sense of self. "I've been very fortunate in the fact that I've earned kind of a trust position with a lot of my younger coworkers - almost like an uncle figure," he explained.

> Kids at work call me Uncle Alex. So, we can talk about stuff that maybe they're not necessarily comfortable talking with other people about, or I can give them a totally different perspective than their peers can - and that affords me a lot of satisfaction.

Several other participants touched on these sentiments about the value they derived from serving as a mentor to younger people, with one noting how it also brings her a sense of youthfulness. Although retired from her career as a pediatrician, Fiona credits socializing with younger populations throughout her career with her own youthful sense of self. She declared,

I've been retired for almost four years. But in that career, I was around a lot of younger

people. Both my patients and residents that were training underneath me, so I had a lot of

young vibes around me, which was awesome. Its kept me feeling youthful so I'm grateful

for that.

Other participants expressed how frequent interactions at work allow them to reaffirm their sense

of self against stereotypical narratives of later life. For instance, Diana highlights the diversity of

social ties and social interaction she experiences as a flight attendant and how this is an integral

part of her work's impact on her self-concept. She insisted,

I have so many connections at work, most importantly my sisters who I share a work

apartment in Toronto with [...] The richness of the people that I work with is always

invigorating, you know, and that is culturally and age wise. So yeah, in that sense work is

a really big thing for me.

Interestingly, she acknowledged how ageist stereotypes can affect younger coworkers'

expectations of her and how she enjoys defying these age-based expectations. She explained,

I'm working with a lot of 20-year-olds [...] they are pretty supposing of what duties

you're going to choose. I know they're going to see my name on the crew list and think,

'Oh my god, she's 70, like she's ancient,' and then I work circles around a lot of them.

So, I like to shake them up a little bit and say, 'I'm going to work this position,' and their

heads all snap up and they say, 'What?' because it's an efficient position with more work

to it, more responsibility, but no more pay, and they assume one of them is going to get

stuck with it. So, I like to do that stuff.

While these are just a few illustrative examples that demonstrate how the social aspects of work impact the identities of the participants in my studies through social mechanisms, this was the dominant theme in my participant interviews.

4.2. Identity, Retirement, and Tension in Later Life

As demonstrated in the previous section, my research findings suggest an enduring relationship between work and the identities of the older adults in my study. Notably, this observation arose across socioeconomic lines and employment statuses. Therefore, it seems that workers develop and maintain an identity as people who do specific kinds of work and grow their identification with their work, just as the capitalist economic system invites them to. However, there appears to be a tension between that very hard-earned identity and the fact that it lets participants down once they retire. It may be their enduring identity, but the internalization of these productive values doesn't necessarily continue to function in a fulfilling manner once they step away from these activities in a society that is so focused on productivity.

Throughout my interviews, several participants described experiencing this sort of post-productive tension in later life, leaving participants without what has been a central tenet of how they know and see themselves in the world. From this, some participants reported experiencing negative self-perceptions as they feel they are not doing enough and find themselves searching for roles and activities to feel productive and meaningfully fill this void. These activities often included physical exercise, domestic affairs, volunteering, and focusing on family. However, while some found new ways to spend their time, relinquishing this enduring aspect of their sense of self remained challenging for many.

4.2.1. Rolelessness and Filling the Void

While some participants report experiences of role loss resulting in identity tensions after leaving behind their work lives, others described a broader sense of rolelessness. After retiring from being a urologist and a surgeon, Eli expressed experiencing a loss of his sense of self, which he argued is comparable to leaving a marriage. He contended, "You know, it's a very difficult thing, and I think that it's a change of life. It's akin to being married and then becoming single." He continued to describe the rolelessness he experienced when entering retirement, revealing,

> I found myself wondering what I'm going to do, and it was kind of stressful. How do you fill a day with nothing? When you're working all the time, you don't think about non-work. So, I did not anticipate that when you stop working that it's such a dramatic change, right? I just thought, 'Oh, it happens. No big deal. Everybody does it.' But then I found that it is part of the part of the problem in today's world.

Although this radical life change surprised him, he insisted that he has adapted to these changes and learned to appreciate them, stating,

> But I'm adjusted, and I know what to do with my days now. I do a bit of gardening, I help my wife with stuff around the house which I didn't have time for previously, I've learned to cook a little bit. All the things that surgeons never do.

Sharing a similar experience of how leaving her career as an optometrist impacted her sense of self, Eleanor agrees with Eli, affirming,

> I had to kind of reconfigure what I thought my purpose was on a daily basis. So, there was an adjustment period for sure. But I tried to find ways to stay busy at the time and I still do. So, it's been a transition in many ways.

When probing how she has managed to fill this void, she declared, "I play golf, go to the gym two to three times a week. Just try and get out and walk every day, do a little bit of exercise, and find ways to keep up my social connections." Although these experiences of rolelessness and rediscovering their purpose was daunting for some, others expressed a more relaxed attitude toward finding ways to fill their time in the process of stepping away from the workforce.

For instance, John expressed that since retirement, he has gone with the flow, with each day bringing new tasks and activities he might engage in. He attested,

Well, now you just do things that you want to do, right? When I was on shift work, I would organize my time better, but because you had to. You work two, and then you're off two. Well, those two days that I'm off I got them planned four days ago. Right? I got an appointment, car appointment, I got to get these things done before I have to go back to work. But now, when you're 65 and retired, you don't really have to do that. I can do it tomorrow, right?"

However, he acknowledged that since retirement is still new to him, this experience of rolelessness may not have fully settled in yet. "As of now it's almost been like I'm off for the summer," he explained. "It's like a vacation, right? But wait till January when I'm in the house, and there's nothing to do." Nonetheless, while several participants overcame this hurdle and discovered meaningful ways to fill their time and feel productive with varying degrees of ease, others continue to struggle with this, resulting in them experiencing relatively negative self-perceptions.

4.2.2. Negative Self-Perceptions

Two participants appeared to be relatively self-critical as a result of the challenges they navigate in adapting to life as a retiree, particularly as it pertains to being active. Grace, a 75-

year-old woman, attested that since retirement, she has attempted to become involved in productive activities, saying, "I'm trying to do more as far as exercise goes […] I became more interested in volunteering until COVID hit, but I'm not doing that now." Following this statement, the woman became critical of herself, confessing,

> I don't feel like I'm doing enough. I'll be very honest. I don't do enough. And it's not because I'm not capable. I'm lazy. I think I've become lazy. I've been retired since 2013. That's ten years. You'd think I would have gotten into something.

In this case, it can be seen how by not adopting new activities that society seems productive since retirement, this woman has developed a negative self-perception to some degree, calling herself "lazy" because she doesn't "do" enough – a stereotypical narrative that stigmatizes older age in industrial capitalist societies.

Hannah was comparably critical of herself, revealing, "I've developed hip issues where I can't walk like I used to and stuff like that, but part of it is also laziness." Again, although this woman acknowledged that she is experiencing some physical limitations, a relatively normal occurrence for people as they age, she labeled herself lazy for not being active enough. After noting how she has had little luck finding meaningful engagement within various senior-focused community programs, she later insisted, "You don't want to become a coach potato and sit at home, that's a big downfall." So, we see here how some participants in my study have been able to navigate this tension in their self-conception that arose as they separated from their enduring identity as employed persons. However, in many cases, it required conscious effort, nonetheless. In contrast, others were more self-critical and still figuring it out. Yet, it is noteworthy that not all participants reported experiencing this self-critical productivity-related tension.

Discussing his retirement experience, Henry, a 71-year-old male, described a story illustrating how he wasn't challenged in reorienting himself post-retirement and viewed it as a directly personal issue for those who are. He argued,

> I bumped into somebody the other day who was my coworker. They are still working, and they said to me, 'Aren't you bored?' I take great offense to that. I think the people who get bored in retirement are boring people. There's no reason to get bored in retirement or as a senior; you just have to keep yourself busy.

After this he conceded that many factors influence a person's ability to keep busy—and indeed, other interviews underscored this key point.

4.2.3. Staying Busy and Socioeconomic Status

Interestingly, although participants from all socioeconomic backgrounds expressed experiencing this tension of searching for purposeful ways to stay busy in retirement and later life, it appears that participants with higher socioeconomic status had a relatively easier time achieving this sense of productivity relative to their lower socioeconomic status counterparts. Moreover, the types of activities my research participants discussed engaging in to fill this post-retirement void varied across socioeconomic lines. For instance, many participants of higher socioeconomic status commonly listed post-retirement activities that they engaged in, such as the gym, cycling, golfing, and travel – all activities that require a certain level of disposable income. As such, people of lower socioeconomic status did not mention these activities that were common among those of higher socioeconomic status with the same frequency and were more likely to vaguely mention filling their time with things like walking, increased family activities, or spending time with friends. Several participants did not recognize this benefit, while others were aware of the cost of rediscovering oneself in retirement.

For instance, Isaac, a 75-year-old man whose career in real estate agent spanned decades, recognized that many of the extracurricular activities he is engaged in require a certain degree of disposable income and the benefits he gains from his socioeconomic position.

I'd have to say that having the financial wherewithal to be able to do these things probably contributes to my health and well-being. You know, I'm able to take trips, I'm able to travel to partake in interesting physical things, you know, like cycling. I'm able to belong to the YMCA, which is not cheap.

Similarly, Charlotte, a 66-year-old woman, spoke extensively about how retirement has granted her a "newfound freedom" to travel with her husband and see the world. However, she acknowledged her socioeconomic status' role in this freedom, attesting, "I will say, a large part of that is because we have some money." She continued recognizing this privilege by comparing her financial situation to her sister's, confessing, "If you talk to my sister, it would be a totally different discussion because she has very little […] so if I didn't have that I know my life would be different." Furthermore, while some participants spoke of the role socioeconomic status can have in older adults' experience of living a fulfilling life after relinquishing their professional identities, others were concerned with highlighting the influence of Canadian society's broader structures in these experiences.

4.3. Older Adult's Experiences in Social and Cultural Context

To this point, I've demonstrated how, throughout the interviews in my research, participants reported an enduring relationship between work and their identity, and the majority implicitly or explicitly exhibited that this relationship is more significant to their identity than their age. The most salient reason participants typically gave for this enduring relationship was the social networks and interactions they gained through their work life. Consequently,

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participants detailed diverse experiences as they relinquished their work identity, where some easily navigated the changes associated with retirement, while many others faced a challenge in doing so. Among the latter group, the tension of reorienting and rediscovering resulted in a stressful experience, with some exhibiting subsequent negative self-conceptions. Naturally, these phenomena do not occur in a vacuum. As several participants reasoned, these negative experiences are a product of Canadian society's cultural, political, and economic nature. In response, some participants described leaning on longstanding friendships and other cultural communities to achieve a sense of belongingness at this stage of their lives.

4.3.1. Sacrificing Social Networks for Productivity

Two of the participants in my study were explicitly critical of the capitalist structures of Canadian society, arguing that these structures are to blame for much of the productivity-related tension older adults experience as they step away from their professional identities. For instance, on the topic of retirement, social networks, and reorienting oneself in later life, Eli gave a compelling perspective on what he views as the catalyst for the tension between work and identity among older Canadians. He argued,

> The shocking thing in society is that capitalist-dominated Canadian or American cultural values use you for your productivity in the workplace, right? […] there is too much emphasis placed on productivity and what you're going to get out of that person for tax reasons, fiscal reasons, productivity of the nation, GDP. What's the productivity of our people for? Do we need to be the most productive nation on earth with the greatest GDP? Do we need to be a member of the G7 nation so that we all work like dogs, give our money to the government? Then the government squanders it somewhere, right? I think it's perverse. […] There's no fixation on the human unless it's legislated. 'Oh, you got to

give people their rights. You can only work 40 hours a week.' None of it's really human. It's all mechanical, right? […] There's nothing that really promotes humanity. If you had a robot, he'd work well in Western social circles, but if it's not a robot, it won't make sense to him.

To him, it was no surprise that as people move on from their work and careers, they experience a lack of meaningful social interaction and social networks:

And because of that, there are no big social networks. The social networks are weak, right? So, for instance, people just get used to non-interaction. So, a problem I see in the West is that there are no social networks. People used to go to church. That was a social network. Then they got rid of Church, right? And a lot of people used to have a lot of children, right? So, they interacted with their children's friends and families. But now everybody has one child […] and the kids just finish college, and they move to the other end of the country. They visit their parents a couple of times a year, but there's not this connection with the previous generation continuing. So, if you look at the framework of Western nations, they do a fair amount for their people. […] I mean we have it all in the West, but nothing comes for free. So, with what you get in the West, you'll lose on those other - social networks, families, churches, you know.

Substantiating this perspective, some participants, described that the social networks they have been engaged in since retirement are largely those that existed much earlier in their lives. Others, in contrast, saw the social structures Eli argued are problematic as positive.

After being work-focused throughout their professional lives and leaving behind their work-related friendships with retirement, four participants described coping with these changes by rekindling connections with old friends. For instance, after acknowledging the lack of

belongingness some people experience post-retirement, Charlotte expressed gratitude for her longstanding social group. She affirmed,

> I'm lucky that I have friends that I grew up with since I was six years old who have always been extremely good friends. […] We feel like we're the same as we were when we were teenagers. A lot of people aren't lucky enough to have that.

Hannah, who earlier in the interview expressed that she is a people person and that her life post-retirement lacked social interaction, shared experiences similar to those of Charlotte. Describing how she relies on her high school friends for much of her social interaction, she explained, "We all turned 70 last year, and we all graduated from high school in 1970. So, we started meeting once every couple of months, having lunch, and, you know, talking about the old times."

> Others seen the social challenges associated with retirement as less of a burden and more of an opportunity to reconnect with friends from the past. Now that work-related obligations no longer occupy him, Henry described this opportunity, attesting,

> So, those friends who maybe you lost touch with, or friends you didn't really see on a regular basis and share a lot of experiences with through earlier the years, all of a sudden, the possibility of sharing life experiences over again with those people becomes real. So, if you've maintained any kind of friendship with those people, you've now ended up in the same place where you're 70 years old. You're retired. You're looking for the same things out of life.

Again, these interview excerpts show that while many participants shared similar experiences in stepping away from work in Canadian society, which can present challenges in their sense of belongingness, they viewed and managed these challenges in their own unique ways.

In contrast to Eli's critical perspective, Alexander viewed the productivity-focused nature of Canadian society as a positive for older adults. He explained,

> You know, you can go to any grocery store, and there are seniors doing shit, you know, they're stocking shelves, and then they're at the cash outs, they're doing this, they're doing that. It's great because when I was in my 20s or whatever, when someone hit that magic age of 60, 65, their world just came crashing down because that that's supposed to be it – 65, you're over. That's it. Have a nice life. Whatever's left of it. But people are saying now, and the government finally is saying, "You know, fuck that". You know, people in their 70s can still be vibrant and still work and be productive members of society. And I think as we progress, those numbers may even increase further, and that's what I'm looking forward to. Because like I said earlier, I'm just going to keep going until I can't go anywhere.

Therefore, for some people, leaving the workforce resulted in adverse outcomes in their sense of purpose and belongingness as they navigate retirement, arguing that Western society's focus on productivity is to blame for these negative outcomes. Others seen this transition period as an opportunity to rediscover themselves, reconnect with old friends, and establish new pathways to fulfillment.

4.3.2. Age Identity and Devaluation of Self

Another common topic that participants implicitly spoke about is the phenomenon of ageism. When speaking on how the notion of what it means to be a "senior" has changed over recent generations, six participants contended that there is a devaluation of aged people in our society. As a result, these people felt that older demographics often experience more discriminating treatment than they did generations ago. The two main ways these participants

noticed this phenomenon include how older adults now receive less direct care from their relatives and that older adults' contributions within relationships and broader society are often overlooked and unheard.

For instance, four participants directly addressed how things have shifted from the family unit caring for their older members throughout their earlier lives to now the norm of older family members often being moved into assisted living facilities while younger family members focus on working in industries outside the home. Concerning this notion, Beatrice, a 71-year-old woman, argued,

> We always used to take care of our older family. Now, you see more people shelving elders in nursing homes because they have to work. In many cases, you have to put your parents in these nursing homes. But what I saw was that we always took care of our parents. My sister took care of my parents. My brother-in-law took care of his parents. This generation doesn't.

Similarly, Diana attested to witnessing these changes across generations in how older adults are now cared for in nursing homes instead of by the family. She asserted, "The closeness of the family is no longer there. We've evolved into a society that isn't there for the elderly in the ways we once were." She then reflected on her husband's family, revealing, "My husband remembers having three generations in the farmhouse living together because you always cared for the elderly. Now we've moved to where many grandparents go into an assisted living home."

Further, not only have norms of care toward older demographics seemingly shifted, but in some ways, this new norm may act as an indirect source of stress for some older adults. When asked about things that excite or concern her in the future, Grace, a 75-year-old woman, questioned whether her daughters would assume the role of her caretaker. However, she

indicated that she would prefer to enter into long-term care as she doesn't want to put a burden on her daughters. Grace declares, "My first concern is getting sick and my daughters worrying about how they're going to take care of me. I would never want to put that on them, you know?" Jokingly, she added, "And I know they wouldn't take care of me ha-ha. So put me in [local nursing home]. Just leave me there. And If I don't know you, don't come see me ha-ha."

The second way participants spoke of this devaluation of older demographics is how they feel overlooked and unheard by younger generations. For instance, Grace described how she enjoys being around younger people; however, in these settings, she often feels as if there is a devaluation of what she has to contribute due to her age. She attested, "Now, when I'm with a group of younger people, you sometimes think you're not being heard or listened to." When probing on any particular instances where she felt this way, she expressed, "Probably with my granddaughter and her boyfriend." In a sense, this statement connects back to the point several participants made throughout my findings, wherein they believe there has been a loss of connection between younger generations and their older family members. In support of this notion, Beatrice expressed similar sentiments:

> What I find is there's no respect for older people anymore. Because young people think that, 'I know everything' or 'I've got this higher education, and you're just old.' So, I'm afraid younger people will not listen to older people anymore. I find that that's very hard. And they're not respectful like we were when we were younger. I mean, growing up, everybody was [referred to as] 'Mr.' and 'Ms.,' and we behaved better than that. So now, there's no respect for the older people who have all this information and don't want us to listen anymore.

Contrary to these participants experiencing what they perceive as increasingly ageist tendencies in recent generations, Amelia, a 65-year-old woman, disagreed, suggesting that there is less ageism in society now. She contended, "Well, as I said, I don't think there seems to be the same degree of ageism these days as years ago," a belief she accredits to older adults in today's society being "a little bit more active."

Nonetheless, expressing personal concerns about ageism's effects on society, Alexander emphasized the value he finds in being there to support *his* parents. He attested,

> If I don't have plans, which I often don't, I'm out seeing Mom and Dad in the Valley. I'm very lucky to say that I consider my Dad a friend and my mom. The dynamic between the three of us may not be a normal situation in our society these days.

However, after acknowledging that this is different from the norm in the Canadian society, he realizes that if he had children or a partner, the level of attention he offers his parents might be different. He avowed, "If I had children or a partner, it might be a lot different. But it's just me. So that's another very fortunate thing in my life is that I am able to make the decision to prioritize these things."

At the root of these ways that make older adults feel devalued and unsupported is ageism, which advances further through the capital-oriented, neoliberal nature of many middle to high income nations. Therefore, since work productivism defines people's identities so heavily in industrial capitalist nations, is it surprising that we do not care for our elders? They are no longer productive in the framework of industrial capitalist conceptions of productivity, nor is the domestic labour of taking care of them personally because society has placed a priority and a necessity on tending to economic activity.

4.3.3. Ethnicity, Culture, and Community

While many participants continued to rediscover themselves beyond their work identity by finding ways to feel productive, others were more introspective, leaning on matters of culture and ethnicity to make sense of themselves and their experiences of aging in Canadian society. Five participants in my sample explicitly identified themselves in ways that distinguish their cultural or ethnic background from white European heritage. Within these participants' responses, there appeared to be an increased sense of belonging and commitment beyond their work identity.

For example, speaking about his gradual departure from the real estate industry, Isaac described his ties to Halifax's Jewish community and the role this plays in his identity. For him, these commitments transcend the significance of his paid work and keep him fulfilled as he leaves his professional role as a real estate agent. He affirmed,

> I mean, I'm licensed, so technically, I'm employed full-time. But I probably only work, you know, an hour or two a day. You know, sometimes more, sometimes less. But I also volunteer at the Jewish synagogue here in Halifax. And in fact, I had two appointments today. One was about getting the fence redone, we've got an iron fence and I'm having a contractor look at that, take it apart, paint it. I also had a meeting with the paver. I'm doing a paving project at the Share Shalom cemetery. So yeah, I like to stay very engaged with the Jewish community.

Similarly, throughout our interview, Eli spoke about his Middle Eastern roots and how that sets him apart from many "Westerners." For instance, he attributed his "Eastern" background to his critical perspective of Western social structures, particularly what he described as the West's fixation on productivity and the economy. He insisted, "You're probably going to hear

stuff that's different from me because I'm Lebanese, right? Because we're an Eastern people, right? I mean, I lived in the West all my life, but it doesn't mean I don't reflect." He continued to emphasize his unique commitment to his family and friends, crediting this to his cultural background. He confessed,

> I feel obligated to my family. I feel that I have an obligation to my people. I have a certain morality I have to live up to. You may not get that from other people. Maybe you will, but I think that it has to do with my Eastern morality.

Eli argued that this bond to a greater community is what's missing in the West and that it has the potential to solve the problem of older adults losing touch with themselves after retirement, as well as other demographics needing a greater sense of belonging. He explained,

> What's missing in the West is the return of the tribe. Right? If the tribe returned, people would be happy. There has to be a new tribalism in the new age of Western society. So, people join the Lion's Club, Kiwanis Club, and the Masons. These are people trying to replicate the tribe, which is missing in Western society. We live in, you know, cities of 10 million people, 6 million people. You should have a staple of friends that you interconnect with on a regular basis, and they're part of your tribe, and then you'll not feel lonely and unhappy, right?

Interestingly, the two other Lebanese participants in my research seem to have implemented this idea in their lives.

Participants One and Two exhibited this sort of "tribe" by attending scheduled meetings with other Lebanese men in the Halifax Mall Food Court every Monday morning for coffee and conversations. Tony, a 85-year-old man, explained how he did not know anybody outside of his coworkers upon first arriving here decades ago. However, through these meetings, he now has a

social network he interacts with weekly that is entirely independent of his previous work contacts.

Therefore, my research findings indicate that while many participants strive to rediscover themselves beyond their work identities by seeking productivity, others delve into their cultural and ethnic backgrounds to orient their sense of self in Canadian society.

4.3.4. Motherhood and Gendered Differences in Identity

A final observation I made when analyzing interview transcripts is how the cultural role of motherhood seemed to be more enduring than women's professional identities and mediates some of the tension of life beyond paid employment. Interestingly, while my interviews with participants frequently and consistently found their way to discussions of people's work and work histories, specifically when prompted with questions that explore their identity, in the case of female participants with children, there was a trend where these people mention being a mother first and reorient conversations to this aspect of themselves just as much as they returned to talking about work.

Of the eight women in my study, seven of them have children. Of these seven, five initiated responses to questions regarding their identity by first speaking on their role as a mother in a manner that seemed to position Motherhood as a master role above age or work. For example, when asked what aspects of her life define her at this age, Grace revealed, "I think of myself as a mother first and a retired old lady," with a giggle to follow. Similarly, Fiona affirmed, "Forget about my age; my identity is that I'm a Mom. My kids are all very grown and adults, but when I think of myself, being a Mother comes first." Additionally, Eleanor, a 66-year-old woman, insisted, "my kids, and now my grandkids, have a really big impact on who I am. Then my career, how I see myself in my career, being a business owner, being a professional." In these

statements, the order in which participants described the various aspects of their self-conception

as mothers before their identities as professionals and business seemed to indicate that these

people place their identity as mothers as paramount to any professional role – an ordering

exhibited by all five of these participants.

On the other hand, the two participants who did not explicitly speak of motherhood in a

way that appeared more significant than their work identity still made it evident that their role as

mothers is at the core of their identity. For instance, Beatrice contended that although she is

dealing with a physical disability that doesn't allow her to work, even if she was able to, she

likely wouldn't, as it is most important for her to be there for her children at this stage in her life.

She explained, "I'm just concerned with my children. Both are dyslexic, one has ADHD and

mental health issues. So, the time I have left is for them. I'm doing everything I can to be able to

help them stay on their feet."

When contrasting this trend across gendered lines, not one male participant initiated their

response by highlighting that they are a father. Indeed, they often spoke of family and their

children throughout their responses, but it was expressed briefly and never preceded the mention

of their career or work life.

Interestingly, Fiona described a similar observation of gender differences in post-

retirement social networks, from which she argued that achieving a fulfilling social life beyond

the workforce is more difficult for men. She explained,

> I look around and see very few men reaching out socially to create a community for
>
> themselves. In my circles, pickleball exempt because there are definitely men there, but in
>
> the other things that I do, if you're out going for a walk with a group of friends, my

friends who are women, you never see a bunch of men going out for a walk. So, I think

that they're for whatever reason more isolated than we are, I can only conclude that.

Although I did not observe this gender difference in later life social connectedness throughout

my data, considering this glaring gendered difference in responses that emphasizes parental over

work identity, it is a noteworthy anecdote to highlight before beginning a critical discussion of

these research findings.

4.4. Findings Conclusion

In summarizing these findings, for the older adults in my research, their identities were

significantly shaped by their careers and professional roles rather than their chronological age.

While several reasons arose throughout participant interviews, the enduring connection between

professional identity and self-perception is predominantly due to gaining a sense of purpose and

the social networks and interactions cultivated through their careers. Therefore, upon retirement,

many participants experienced a profound identity crisis and a loss of self-worth as they

relinquished their professional roles. With this rolelessness is a sense of personal devaluation that

intensifies in the context of industrial capitalist nations, which prioritizes productivity and

economic contribution over other forms of social contribution and status. Consequently, retired

individuals often struggled to find new ways to feel productive and valued, highlighting the need

for societal shifts that recognize and support diverse forms of identity and contribution beyond

the workforce. Finally, there appeared to be some gender differences in the fulfillment of identity

in retirement, with men seemingly experiencing greater difficulty with self-contentment.

Therefore, as elaborated in the following section, these findings indicate that a move toward

some form of a post-capitalist society might help facilitate an environment where older adults

have more opportunities to maintain a strong sense of identity and purpose, feel valued for their

diverse contributions, and enjoy a fulfilling life beyond their professional careers.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter critically discusses the findings from the interviews conducted in this qualitative research, which explores how older adults from various socioeconomic backgrounds residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, experience the aging process in relation to their identity. These interviews gained insight into how these people perceive themselves and manage their identity within the context of industrial capitalist narratives and norms of older age, as well as how these experiences shape their lives.

The older adults in this research generally indicate that their work roles and environment are much more relevant to their identities than their chronological age. This enduring connection between their professional role and self-perception primarily results from how they identify with their work and the robust social networks and opportunities for meaningful social interaction they have cultivated throughout their careers. It was common for the older adults in this study to express experiencing a certain hesitancy and tension leading up to and during the process of retirement, wherein they often find themselves searching for new ways to feel productive, valued, and connect with others in meaningful ways. As they separate from their professional roles, this post-retirement uncertainty many participants express leads some to navigate a loss of self-worth as they feel they are no longer doing "enough."

Based on the existing literature, this sense of devaluation results from, and is further exacerbated by, the capital-oriented nature of high and middle income nations (Berger, 2017; Liang et al., 2012), which prioritizes and values notions of productivity and economic pursuits over social connectedness and socially reproductive contributions. Moreover, as this research highlights, there is a need for a societal shift that recognizes and supports the diverse identities of older adults and their capacity for valuable contributions beyond the workforce. Therefore, due

to the enduring connection between work and older adults' identities, its impact on their experiences and sense of self in later life, and the nature of Canada's productivity-focused society, the present study indicates that a shift toward some form of a post-capitalist economy might have positive effects on the identity and well-being of older adults in Canadian society.

Throughout the literature review, several theoretical frameworks – activity theory, continuity theory, and the social construction of age – were shown to help situate this research for an opportunity to understand better the aging experiences of older adults in this study and how these experiences interrelate with their identity. This section analyzes these research findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and existing empirical evidence, identifying commonalities and divergences, before elaborating on the significance of these findings in how they indicate that transitioning toward a post-capitalist economy could improve the well-being and self-contentment of older adults in Canadian society.

5.1. The Enduring Relationship Between Work and Identity

As described in the previous chapter, the older adults in this research were quick to downplay the significance of their age in their identities while implicitly demonstrating how the work they have engaged in throughout their lives is much more relevant to their self-conceptions. Of the seventeen people in this research, sixteen somehow brought up their work and career experiences without being asked to do so. During the frequent and impassioned conversations about their current employment or work histories, it became evident that, generally, there is an enduring relationship between this aspect of these research participants' lives and their identities that was unexpected at the outset of this research. However, this enduring relationship between participants' work and identities begins to make sense through the theoretical frameworks of continuity theory and activity theory.

For instance, from the perspective of continuity theory, people strive to maintain internal and external structures developed over their lifetime as a mechanism of adaptation to the aging process (Atchley, 1972, p. 36). As such, internal continuity involves maintaining consistent beliefs, thought patterns, and personality traits, while external continuity pertains to activities, lifestyles, and social roles (Atchley, p. 36). Therefore, continuity theory highlights the importance of sustaining connections with past experiences to counteract the potential adverse psychosocial effects of aging (Atchley, 1989, p. 183). Atchley (1972) asserts that understanding how people respond to aging requires examining the complex interplay between biological and psychological changes, internal and external perceptions, and opportunities for continuity (p. 36). Thus, personal preferences and societal validation are critical in making continuity an effective adaptive strategy for aging (Atchley, 1989, p. 183). Interestingly, this enduring relationship between work and participants' identities aligns with continuity theory, wherein participants exhibited a desire to hold onto familiar roles, relationships, and activities, particularly in the context of retirement, which through this framework can be seen as a mechanism of adaptation as they seek to maintain a stable sense of self through this life-altering event.

After framing these research findings in this light, there are several instances where participants seemingly attempt to maintain continuity in their internal and external structures as they acclimate to their lives as retirees. For instance, in the case of maintaining continuity of internal structures, Eli contends that even though he no longer has the professional status of a surgeon, he still views himself as a surgeon and does not like to think about himself as retired. Interestingly, Teuscher's (2010) research on identity and retirement had similar findings, wherein the professional domain was equally as crucial for retired and employed respondents in their self-descriptions, with many retired participants holding onto their professional identity after

retirement from their professional roles (p.102). Therefore, Teuscher argues that this enduringness of professional identity post-retirement functions as a way of adapting to the life changes associated with retirement through the maintenance of positive self-concept (p.104).

Similarly, in speaking on her reluctance to retire, Diana explains how younger airline employees have certain age-based expectations of her, such as that she will not be as efficient of a worker due to her age. She finds fulfillment in actively defying these expectations, ultimately reifying her internal structure as someone who remains equally capable as her younger coworkers. Therefore, the idea of retirement threatens the stability of these internal narratives, and these two examples are participants attempting to maintain internal continuity through their longstanding self-concept of themselves as skilled and capable people who meaningfully contribute to society.

On the other hand, a glaring example of participants' desires to maintain external structures appears in the many people who spoke about the positive impact of the social networks and social interactions that they gain from their employment and their hesitancy to let go of these social connections as a likely outcome that will coincide with retirement. However, we also see social networks as a primary form of maintaining continuity among retirees. For example, some participants express that, although they have lost a large portion of their social network through retirement, they now look to their continued connection with friends from many decades ago for social interaction, illustrating a mechanism of continuity they have maintained across multiple life stages. Charlotte explicitly states that when she and her friends from high school get together now, they still feel like teenagers.

In a broader sense, continuity theory may explain some of the trepidation expressed by those workers who are still employed and putting off retirement, such as Diana and Mark, those

who have drastically reduced their working hours but are yet to commit to retiring, such as Hannah, and those who have retired and then returned to work in some capacity, such as Eli and Isaac. In this sense, the reluctance of these people to separate from their work roles and environment also represents a defense mechanism to the idea of discontinuity.

However, two instances in these research findings diverge from continuity theory, wherein Charlotte and Fiona are enthusiastic about welcoming the post-work chapter of their lives. Interestingly, both participants are mothers, and based on their self-descriptions, most of the mothers in this study appear to hold this role in a higher regard than their work identity. Therefore, these women may find continuity in their role as mothers, rendering the loss of continuity from leaving the workforce easier to manage. Nonetheless, continuity theory is a valuable tool for understanding the enduring relationship between work and the older adults in this study's identities and why many experience tension around retirement.

5.2. The Search for Ways to Feel Productive

Fourteen of the seventeen participants in this study explicitly discussed how they perceive themselves as "active" or how they keep themselves "busy" to varying extents. Many of these research participants either implicitly or explicitly demonstrate how staying actively engaged in various activities contributes to maintaining their well-being and identity as they navigate the age-related changes in later life. However, it appears that upon entering retirement, several participants report significant challenges in finding meaningful ways to fulfill this capacity for activity and subsequently experience a decreased sense of self-contentment. From one perspective, this may be due to the discontinuity they are experiencing in their external structures, as put forth by continuity theory. Nevertheless, from the activity theory perspective,

there is an alternative explanation for the tension and uncertainty these participants experience upon retirement.

According to activity theory, there is a positive correlation between the level of activity older adults engage in and their well-being as they adapt to age-related changes in later life (Dorfman et al., 1988, p.26). Winstead et al. (2017) explain that as people age, social structures often displace them from certain activities and roles, leading to decreased life satisfaction and negatively impacting their sense of self (p.3). Therefore, activity theory suggests that people develop and maintain their sense of self through engagement in social roles and activities, which act as restorative mechanisms by replacing previous roles and behaviors, enhancing life quality and self-contentment (Winstead et al., p.3). Further, Dorfman (1988) emphasizes that informal social interactions with friends, relatives, coworkers, and neighbors have the most positive impact, as these social networks provide essential support systems that reaffirm self-concept and promote late-life satisfaction (p.26).

Aligning with activity theory, while not always explicitly recognized as an adaptive mechanism to the age-related changes of later life, for the most part, many of the older adults in this research indicate that maintaining high levels of engagement across a range of activities is an essential part of participants remaining whole. For instance, Alexander praised his managerial role at a local restaurant for keeping him engaged physically and mentally, which he believes is fundamental to how people feel about themselves – a sentiment that several other participants echoed. Additionally, many participants expressed the importance of staying busy with non-paid activities at this point in their lives, such as Isaac, who attests to the fulfillment he gains from being actively involved with the Jewish community in Halifax, wherein he describes ongoing voluntary labor projects he is leading at the synagogue and the Share Shalom cemetery. Other

participants described a wide variety of leisure activities that they engage in, such as walking, tennis, pickleball, cycling, golfing, and domestic affairs, among other things. Importantly, participants suggested that most of these activities are carried out with other people in their social network, highlighting the significance of informal interaction as activity theory advances.

However, activity theory also provides insight into the couple of older adults who had moments where they expressed relatively negative self-conceptions due to feeling as if they were "doing enough" at this stage of their lives. For example, both retired participants, Grace and Hannah, were self-critical because they did not engage in enough activity at this stage of their lives, labeling themselves "lazy." Suppose we are to view activity theory as valid, which these research findings offer some merit, then the negative self-perceptions exhibited by these participants can be reminded of whether they had an outlet for increased activity. However, due to many circumstances, finding such an outlet is more difficult for some social groups than others. From an alternative perspective, these participants may be negotiating away from genuinely having less energy, which might be a natural part of the aging process for some, and placing the blame on themselves by inheriting the label of laziness rather than taking on the stigma that of a stereotypical "old" person.

For instance, interestingly, these two participants ranked lower on the composite socioeconomic status scoring table I developed for the present study. As many participants spoke of participating in leisure activities that require disposable income, this leads to consideration of how possessing the material recourses associated with higher socioeconomic status levels may mediate this tension of productivity in later life. Additionally, as demonstrated by a robust volume of health literature, people of lower socioeconomic status generally experience more negative health outcomes than people of higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Cruikshank, 2013;

Lopes, 2011; Pickard, 2016). Therefore, some of these more physically demanding activities may not be possible for people of lower socioeconomic status; even if we controlled for disposable income, older adults of lower socioeconomic status still face more significant barriers to potentially engaging in these ways of feeling productive.

In less self-critical instances, several participants expressed a sense of tension they experienced as they entered retirement, leaving behind the primary activity that occupied most of their time throughout adulthood. As Eli and Eleanor explained, with the departure from their careers, they made significant efforts to search for novel ways to become meaningfully engaged again, which, for most, they ultimately did after some time in retirement. Therefore, from the lens of activity theory, it appears that since people pour so much of their time into their careers throughout adulthood, when they relinquish their professional duties, an internal struggle arises from this void of inactivity wherein, if they were not already engaged in some form of leisure hobbies or interests across their working lives, they are left searching for ways to fill the void left in the absence of their work life.

However, the present findings diverge from activity theory along the same lines that this theoretical framework has received some of its main criticisms – not all people prefer staying active; therefore, not everyone will derive the same fulfillment from staying busy with leisure activities (Loue et al., 2008, p.80). One example of this appears in John, who is entirely happy with taking things day by day, engaging in sporadic moments of activity while finding satisfaction in sedentary activities at other times rather than consciously seeking out a steady baseline of activity to fill his time.

With these findings in mind, in line with the activity theory, I question whether, in some cases, this desire to remain active that participants so commonly express throughout the

interviews is a means of negotiating away from their chronological age - a stigmatized identity in Canadian society - and the stereotypical notions of the slowing and decrepit person that are associated with older age, toward presenting a more robust, youthful social identity that society is more likely to value.

5.3. Identity Management in a Productivity-Focused Society

All the participants in the present research are over age 65 – a milestone age that many middle to high income nations denote as "old age" and myopically presumes an increasing state of frailness, dependence, and inevitable inactivity. However, many of the participants in this research exhibit quite the opposite of these traits. With the exception of one person, all other participants in this research live without formal assistance, and many remain frequently engaged in various forms of physical and social activities. Naturally, several participants did express experiencing some form of mild physical aliment or limitation. However, these conditions do not define them as they continue in much of the same lifestyles they did before reaching this age milestone. In fact, some people are increasing their activity levels as they move on from work-related obligations to retirement. Therefore, the notion that there is a fixed and linear process of aging that is denoted by the number of years one has lived appears to be incapable of explaining the diverse identities and nuanced experiences of older adults. To better understand how the chronological age system structures older adults' identities and experiences of aging, in conjunction with the capitalist economic system, it is useful to consider the social constructionist perspective of age.

Social constructionist scholars argue that the chronological concept of age is arbitrary and reductive, as physical, psychological, and cognitive markers of aging do not occur uniformly across the broader population (Overall, 2006, pp.129-130). Instead, from a social constructionist

perspective, aging is a social process heavily influenced by cultural, political, and economic contexts (Degnen, 2007; Overall, p.130). Therefore, this approach argues that societal norms and social interactions shape what it means to age or be of a certain age rather than solely by biological factors. Findings from the present study are consistent with the social constructionist view of age, most prominently in the broad diversity of participants' physical and social capacities and, for many, their defiance of age-based expectations. However, participants remain often subjects of ageist judgment and devaluation due to the marginalizing nature of the chronological age system and the implications of this social structure within the boundaries of the capitalist economic system.

Within the capitalist economic system, production, or work, is pivotal in shaping an individual's identity by affording social status and prestige, as capitalist society equates success with material achievements, rewarding and evaluating individuals almost exclusively for their economic accomplishments (Manor, 2017, p.986). Therefore, in Canadian society, where cultural imperatives of capitalism prioritize productivity and independence, there is a diminished sense of worth among those who need to fit the preconceived ideals of a productive person (Liang et al., 2012, p.329). Being that productivity is often synonymous with youthfulness in Canadian culture, one group who inevitably suffers under these marginalizing structures is older adults. Consequently, this negative view that is cast upon older adults reaches beyond individual expectations and permeates various societal structures and institutions, such as media and legislative policies, producing adverse consequences for this demographic.

For instance, many older adults in this research acknowledge the societal pressure to follow traditional social scripts and retire at age 65 despite possessing the physical and mental capacity to continue working. Defying any notion that retirement at 65 is necessary due to older

adults' incapacity to fulfill their work roles, several participants continue to thrive as they work well past retirement age. In contrast, others express that they could have continued working if it was not for other circumstances that led them to retire. Moreover, in only one case did a participant retire because of the incapacities that affect them due to the aging process.

Even so, it should be no surprise, as social research has long shown that older adults make valuable contributions to the economic order (Moody & Sasser, 2012). Furthermore, beyond their capacity for productivity in a capitalist economic context, participants spoke about their socially reproductive activities, such as childcare and domestic affairs. Nevertheless, as capitalism fundamentally revolves around creating goods for purchase on the market, unpaid activities, like socially reproductive work, are rendered valueless in our society (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.2).

Reflecting on the present research findings, the existing literature, and the theories of activity and continuity, it is apparent that these social structures disenfranchise older adults and, in many ways, put their well-being in jeopardy. For instance, many participants in this study emphasize how vital their work lives and social networks are to their well-being and identity. Importantly, there is plenty of empirical evidence to support these findings. Then, consider continuity theory and its notion that older adults cope with changes related to aging by finding ways to establish internal and external continuity. However, running counter to this are societal pressures and government legislation that push them out of their professional roles, often resulting in the loss of their social networks and disrupting this sense of continuity that helps them adapt to the aging process.

On the other hand, through the lens of activity theory, once older adults relinquish their professional roles, they are without the primary source of activity they have participated in

throughout their lives. Then, many are left searching for ways to be productive and actively engaged in a society that does not value their active contributions within or outside the economic system. Therefore, with such evidence strongly diverging from capital-oriented, ageist notions of older adults as unproductive, how might we alleviate older adults' experiences of inequality that is embedded in the current social structures and realize the value of their contributions within and outside of economic activities?

5.4. Post-Capitalist Futures

Throughout sociological literature, there have long been calls for a departure from the current social structures, advocating for varying notions of a "post-capitalist" society (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.1). Although there is no decisive conception of society beyond growth-oriented economic activity (Schmid, 2019, p.7), based on the existing post-capitalist literature, the findings in this study, and activity and continuity theories, there are three societal shifts that might improve older adults' identity tensions and quality of life. These three societal changes that could lend to more equitable experiences in later life are the decommodification of labour, recognition of socially reproductive labour, and diverse forms of value contribution to society (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.8). Some social scientists advocate for a cooperativist style economic system, such as a sharing economy or a community economy (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; Schmid, 2019;), while others endorse an economic democratic model (Schmid, p.9; Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.6).

In the former model of economic organization, pooling and sharing resources among a population of people would eliminate personal ownership, moving society away from fixating on hyper-production and hyper-consumption, providing a more egalitarian distribution of resources that emphasizes the collective good and diminishes exploitation (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020,

p.31; Schmid, 2019, p.6). As an alternative to the capitalist economic system, Peticca-Harris et al. suggest that this collaborative economic network might comprise activities such as worker cooperatives, community gardens, food, home, and renewable energy cooperatives, and a variety of other forms of collective ownership and management (p.30). Further, exchange within such a cooperative network might often incur casual, spontaneous one-time transactions, non-monetary payments, agreements that rely on the local availability of goods and services, and horizontal large-scale infrastructure, including multiple stakeholders, regulatory bodies, and government. (Peticca-Harris et al., p.32; Schmid, 2019, p.6). However, while such cooperativist reconfiguration of economic and social relations is a positive advancement from capitalism, these ideas are not without their criticisms either (Celata & Stabrowski, 2022).

Other scholars theorize about a post-capitalist society from a more traditional perspective, such as the idea of economic democracy. For instance, Vincent & Brandellero (2023) discuss the idea of an economic system where workers are responsible for controlling the means of production and the distribution of surplus, suggesting that this is a step toward escaping exploitation and creating increasingly humane work environments that offer more intrinsically rewarding work, more free time, and subsequently less alienation (p.6).

In demonstrating the equitable potential of economic democracy, Vincent & Brandellero (2023) offers the example of a democratically ran Argentinian company, where within this cooperative, most decisions are collectively arbitrated upon by the workers (Vincent & Brandellero, p.6). In this case study, the workers express that this is one aspect they value most about their job, as they gain a sense of autonomy and, at the same time, feel responsible for what they are doing and how their decisions impact everyone involved (Vincent & Brandellero, p.6). Schmid (2019) highlights the positive potential of such a shift toward horizontal types of place-

based organizing, which do not just shift from top–down to bottom-up approaches, by challenging vertical societal structuring and prioritizes relational perspectives (p.9). Therefore, this democratic economic system fosters enhanced personal and collective responsibility and a non-monetary ethos wherein workers have chosen to remain with the company when having opportunities for higher pay elsewhere because of their affective involvement in the collective (Vincent & Brandellero, 2023, p.6). However, as with notions of a cooperativist economic organization, there have been skeptics regarding the capacity of democratic economic systems to bring about the idealized changes in the relationship between production, distribution, and consumption sought by many post-capitalist advocates (Bolton, 2020, p.339).

Nonetheless, as seen in the varying ideas regarding the possibilities for a post-capitalist society, the 'post' represents the notion of 'alternative' economic structures that transcend the current capitalist system (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020, p.332). Admittedly, being that my research did not set out to explore notions of productivity and capitalism, I would have needed to probe participants about these topics more directly to arrive at any argument regarding the enduringness of older adults' work identity and the phenomenon of post-capitalism. However, while somewhat ambiguous, this study's findings and these theoretical musings provide a foundation for future research, recognizing that some form of a post-capitalist society, with its potential for diverse valuation of contributions, decreased social inequality, and enhanced autonomy, may have benefits for older adults as find ways to identify with and make meaning out of later life.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As Canadian society experiences a significant demographic shift, wherein the rapid growth of people in later life represents an increasingly significant portion of society, it is critical that their voices are heard and experiences understood (Adawi et al., 2023, p.49). For instance, as per the United Nations, the percentage of Canadians aged 60 and above is projected to climb from 22.3% in 2015 to 32.4% in 2050, indicating that almost a third of Canada's population will be over 60 years old in 2050 (Adawi et al., p.49). This shift in demographics raises significant considerations for Canada's social and economic systems and the older adults who comprise this segment of the population. For this reason, the heterogeneity of older adults' experiences is urgent to understand and recognize to ensure their well-being in society. Therefore, the present research has focused on uncovering older adults' unique experiences of the aging process, how these experiences affect their identities, and how socioeconomic status might influence this relationship. Through semi-structured interviews, seventeen older adults residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia, provided qualitative data regarding their aging experiences in Canadian society. While the present research set out to better understand the influence of age on their self-conceptions as they navigate the aging process, the older adults in this study were more significantly influenced by their careers and professional roles rather than their age. During participant interviews, various factors were identified as reasons for the enduring link between professional identity and self-perception, with a particular emphasis on finding a sense of purpose and the relationships formed through their careers. Therefore, when these people approach or enter retirement, many are met with tension around the idea of giving up their professional duties and domains. For some, the lack of these longstanding roles leads to a feeling of diminished self-worth, exasperated by Canadian society's prioritization of economic value and

"productivity. As a result, many retirees face difficulty in seeking new ways to feel heard, valuable, and appreciated, and it appears that societal changes that acknowledge and endorse various forms of identity and contribution outside of work may help liberate this growing population. Therefore, from the findings of this study, in conjunction with the existing theories and empirical evidence, there is a legitimate basis for further research regarding older adults' identities and the potential benefits of some form of post-capitalist society, wherein older adults receive appreciation for their various contributions, are not confined to marginalizing discourse, and structures, and experience fulfilling lives in their later years.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1) What is your age?

A. _____

2) To which gender identity do you most identify?

A. _____

B. Prefer not to say

3) Which of the following best describes you?

A. Caucasian

B. African-American

C. Latino or Hispanic

D. Asian

E. Native American

F. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

G. Two or More: _____

H. Other/Unknown

I. Prefer not to say

4) Where were you born?

A. North America

B. Central America

C. South America

D. Europe

E. Africa

F. Asia

G. Australia

H. Pacific Islander

I. Caribbean Islands

J. Other

K. Prefer not to say

5) What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

A. Less than a high school diploma

B. High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)

C. Some college, no degree

D. Associate degree

E. Bachelor's degree

F. Master's degree

G. Doctorate

H. Trade School

I. Other

J. Prefer not to say

6) What is your current employment status?

A. Employed full time (40 or more hours per week)

B. Employed part time (up to 39 hours per week)

C. Unemployed and currently looking for work

D. Unemployed and not currently looking for work

E. Retired

F. Self-employed

G. Unable to work

H. Prefer not to say

7) What is your annual household income?

A. Less than $25,000

B. $25,000 - $50,000

C. $50,000 - $100,000

D. $100,000 - $200,000

E. More than $200,000

F. Prefer not to say

Appendix B

Interview Guide

<u>Introduction</u>

1. Summarize my research project, goals, and explain why the participant is appropriate for this study.

2. Prompt questions they may have before beginning the interview.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

1. So, how old are you?

2. How important do you think your age is in terms of who you are?

    1. Is it something that you think about often?

    2. Does it dictate the types of activities/people/roles you engage in?

3. Tell me about things that you think are important in terms of who you are at this stage of your life?

    1. How have these things changed in the most recent stage of your life?

4. When you think about being (current age) in Atlantic Canada, what comes to mind?

    1. Any positive/negative/words/experiences?

5. Do you feel you are expected to act a certain way as an older person?

    1. Things you are/aren't supposed to do?

6. If you rewind back to say 35 years old, does your (current age) feel how you imagined it would?

    1. Older/Younger?

2. Are there any things that have surprised you?

7. Throughout your life, what have your views/attitude on the idea of aging/the aging process been?

   1. Is it something you've always embraced/been comfortable with it? Have you recently grown comfortable with it? Have you been fearful? Is it something you ever thought much about at all?

8. Do you feel that Canada society offers enough opportunities to meaningfully engage with others at this stage of your life?

   1. If yes, in what ways?

   2. If not, are there any ways you believe seniors can be better supported in society?

9. How have these notions of what it means to be a senior changed over your lifetime?

   1. Can you think of any examples in terms of how your parents or grandparents might have identified as senior citizens?

10. What role do you think that your financial position has played in the way you have aged?

11. What role do you think your education has played in the way you have aged?

12. What role do you think your occupation has played in the way you've aged?

13. What comes to mind when you imagine the next 5-10 years of your life?

    1. Any things you are excited for? Any things you are concerned about?

14. If you could provide the next generation with one piece of advice about aging or life in general, what would it be?

Conclusion

1. Ask participants to offer any concluding thoughts.

2. Thank participants and remind them that they may share my Dalhousie email address with any older adults they believe are appropriate for my study and may like to participate in this research.

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Experiences of Aging and Older Adult's Identity Tensions Across Socio-Economic Lines

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by me, Paul Pike, a graduate student in Sociology, as part of my Master's degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to find out more about senior's perceptions of the aging process, including how this process and society's notions of senior citizenship affects their identity, and what role socioeconomic status might play in experiences. After gaining such insights, I will write up the results of this research in a paper that is accredited toward my degree, called the Master's thesis.

As a participant in the research, you will be asked to answer about 20 interview questions about your views on the aging process, how you view yourself in relation to this process, and whether socioeconomic status has a role in shaping these outcomes. The interview should take about an hour and will be conducted in a quiet location of your choice or using a video conference platform of your choice (Zoom or Microsoft Teams). The interview will be audio-recorded. If I quote any part of our conversation in my Master's thesis, I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you from the quote.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to pause or stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until two weeks after the date of your interview. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I may have begun incorporating it into my analysis.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer.

I will audio-record all the interviews (with your consent), using the voice memo function on my personal iPhone with the "auto-sync" setting disabled. After each interview, I will transfer the recording from my iPhone onto my encrypted, password-protected personal laptop, and delete the audio file from my iPhone immediately thereafter.

If we conduct the interview by Zoom/Teams, I will also record the interview using the platform's internal recording feature. During the live Zoom/Teams meeting, audio and video content is routed through the United States, and therefore may be subject to monitoring without notice, under the provisions of the US Patriot Act, while the meeting is in progress. However, the risk associated with using Zoom/Teams recording for this research is no greater than using Zoom/Teams recording for any other purpose. After the meeting is complete, meeting recordings are securely stored in Canada and are inaccessible to US authorities.

If you choose to use Zoom, I will save the meeting recording on my password-protected laptop. I will delete the video recording immediately, retaining the audio recording to transcribe. If participants choose to use Teams, I will save the full meeting recording in my password-protected Dalhousie OneDrive account.

I will store the interview recordings on my laptop and OneDrive until I have received the final evaluation of my thesis, likely in the second quarter of 2024, at which time I will permanently delete the recordings.

I will transcribe my handwritten notes and the interviews recordings myself. I will file these notes and transcripts in a password-protected Microsoft Word document on my encrypted, password- protected laptop shortly after the interview. When I have transcribed my handwritten notes, I will immediately dispose of the originals by shredding them. Immediately after having transcribed the interview recording, I will anonymize the transcripts by omitting details which would clearly identify you, and I will assign a pseudonym to each participant. I will retain these anonymized transcripts for two years following the conclusion of this study so that I can learn more from them as I continue with my research in the sociology of aging.

If you choose to withdraw from my research after the interview prior to the two weeks post-interview deadline, I will immediately delete all files associated with you, including interview notes, transcript, and recordings, and I will shred your consent form.

The risks associated with this study are minimal but include potential discomfort that might arise from sharing sensitive or negative experiences. If you feel upset at any point during the interview, you are welcome to take a break or stop the interview entirely.

There will be no tangible benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. However, by participating in this research, you will be contributing valuable knowledge to the sociological literature pertaining to the relationship between senior's experiences of the aging process, its effects on identity, and the role of socioeconomic status in this relationship. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to request a copy of your interview transcript and/or my Master's thesis, which I can send you after it is evaluated in the second quarter of 2024.

If you have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or my Master's research supervisor. My contact information is ppike@dal.ca. You can contact my Master's research supervisor, Dr. Liesl Gambold, at Dalhousie University's Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, by email at liesl.gambold@dal.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email ethics@dal.ca.

Participant's consent:

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.
Name:
Signature:
Date:
Researcher's signature: Date:

I would like a copy of my interview transcript and/or the master's thesis emailed to this address: